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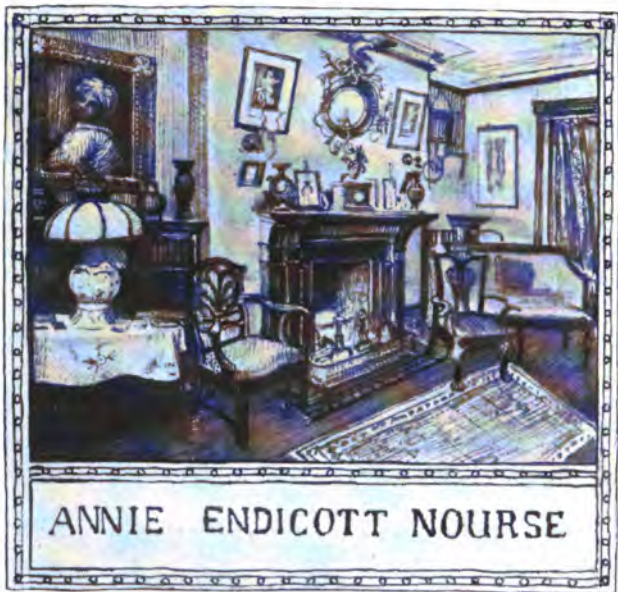
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THE GREATER GLORY. BY MAARTEN MAARTENS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

Elizabeth S. Hauser
July 1895-

THE GREATER GLORY

A STORY OF HIGH LIFE

Landroon-

BY

MAARTEN MAARTENS,

AUTHOR OF "THE SIN OF JOOST AVELINGH," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1894.

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Amos A. Abbott, Jr.

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THE GREATER GLORY.

CHAPTER I.

MARGHERITA DISCOVERS THAT YOU CAN MAKE EVEN A
COLD COUNTRY TOO HOT TO HOLD YOU.

"YES, it is very beautiful, Hilarius," said Mevrouw Elizabeth at dinner. "But it is an immense responsibility."

The Count jumped at the idea. He, who had always been known in his own family as "The Grumbler," was rather embarrassed in the presence of his relatives by his great good fortune. "It is indeed," he answered, pulling down his face. "I have no end of worry already, in connection with the repairs and accounts, and things."

"I was thinking of the souls," said Mevrouw Elizabeth.

"Oh; ah, yes, of course. Will you have some claret?" He smiled across the table nervously to his brother, who, on his part, was praising everything, as in duty bound, to Margherita.

"Yes," said Margherita. "And for me, of course, there are many touching memories. But we are going back as soon as possible. Immediately after Christmas. I do not like the country. At least not one which is all white blanket. In my home the country was all flowers." She turned to Guy. "How I envy you at Leyden," she said. "They tell me that the students have a magnificent library there. You can get all the new books. Have you already read—I am reading it—'Les Maîtresses à Papa'?"

"N—n—no," stammered her nephew, "I've asked for it several times. But some professor's always got it, don't you know."

"Well, you can read it here. I have brought it with me. And anything else you like. There is a large library."

"I should like some of your own poems best, aunt," replied Guy with a bow. He was a fool, but his career at the University had taught him, as he called it, "how to manage women." None but a fool ever thinks he has learnt that.

"Flatterer! Do you fancy I believe you? I reserve them for Laïssa. It is the bane of my sex and my rank combined that I cannot aspire to literary fame."

This was a favourite illusion of Margherita. She had even embodied it in the following lines:

"Vous me donnez, ô dieux, bien plus que je réclame
 Vous m'écrasez, ô dieux. Quel bonheur est le mien!
 Je suis poète—assez!—et noble—assez!—et *femme*.
 C'est trop—car ce n'est rien."

The idea left an unlimited margin for dumb-poetship.

Young Reinout was telling his neighbour Topsy all about the glories and discoveries of his new abode. He had barely stopped talking to her ever since her arrival, and still there was so much to tell! Already had he shown her his "favourite" nooks and crannies and taken her up to the little oriel window in the west turret, from which, "if you squeeze your neck round *so*" ("Oh don't, Rein! I can squeeze my own neck, please!") "you can see (what milksops girls are!) the little spire there—don't you see?—of the church. And, oh, Topsy, that reminds me; there's a delightful old priest, who is going to tell me the names of all the animals in existence. You and I must go and see him together." And he had taken them all to admire the great stained-glass window in the upper hall. "It is very nicely done," said Jane, who painted a little. The cousins had wondered whose were the roses argent that blended with the other shield. But the owners were dead as the roses, and their glory had certainly nothing in common with these upstarts of to-day.

And now, at dinner, Reinout was full of the coming festivities, an English Christmas with holly all over the house (alas, mistletoe is unattainable) and a genuine flaming plumpudding.—"As long as I needn't touch it," said the Countess Margherita. He was so excited that he was behaving badly—he who never had an opportunity of behaving badly; the opportunity and the use he made of it were things to be thankful for! Monsieur de Souza was away for a holiday in Paris, "to look up old friends," he had said ("de vieilles amies"). "Allez, my dear Chevalier, I understand you; to make

young ones." "Monsieur, what do you think of? These things, in a few years, they will be for your son." Well educated, well cared for, of boundlessly magnificent future, happy René!

So thought Mevrouw Elizabeth. - "What a charming pair they make," she said complacently to her brother-in-law.

Before Count Hilarius could answer, Reinout, wheeling round to whisper in Topsy's ear what he had bought for his mother, threw out his arm and upset his wine-glass with a great smashing splash over the dessert-dishes. A sudden flame leaped up in the Countess's dark eyes. "René," she cried in a voice hot with passion, "leave the table immediately. You are not fit to sit down with your aunt!" He got up unwillingly: "Mamma!" he began. "Silence. Your manners are like a pig's. It makes me sick to see how you behave." He walked out of the door, and first longed to slam it and then closed it carefully: And as he crept heavily upstairs, he muttered: "She has a right to send me away, but not to insult me. And who is she to talk of cochonneries?" For he had heard a whisper—somehow; who shall say how in a house of many servants?—of Mademoiselle de Cochonnard.

Well, he only knew that the name of his mother's noble family had originally been spelt and pronounced as above. Probably there was some interesting story connected with its old-time origin. When he was older, he would find out what the legend was. Some stirring tale like that of the maiden Wendela and the grand old lion—oh how he loved him!—who had come with his flaming sword to set the maiden free.

He locked himself in with his dog; he felt sore, for his mother had publicly humiliated him. And he got together his few beetles and bugs and sulked over the boxes and bottles. It was a new mania. And then he leaned out on the stone parapet, over the water, with his nose against Prince's, and wondered who lived in the moon.

Frederik van Rexelaer found time for a few words of quiet chat with his brother, as they stood side by side in the smoking-room over their coffee—the two young men were playing billiards a few paces off.

"What is this that I hear about an unpleasantness at the railway-station?" he began. "Nothing really important, I hope?"

"Nothing," replied Hilarius, tapping the parquet with his foot. "I wonder Margherita was so foolish as to mention it. She does not take kindly to our rules of implicit obedience. That is all."

"It was not Margherita that I heard it from, Hilarius. Simmans told me of it, the young Clerk of the Police Court. One of his officials drew his attention to the names."

"Good Heavens!" cried the Count, standing horror-struck, cigar in hand. "You don't mean to say they are going to follow it up?"

"They evidently are. She will be summoned for resisting the constituted authorities."

"And locked up! Or set to oakum-picking! The idiots who manage these things in this country are capable of anything. She is right. We should have stopped in Brazil!" The Count stamped up and down

the room. The billiard-players looked wonderingly across.

"I would thank you, Hilarius, to speak more advisedly of the organisation of which I form a part." The meek little man was nettled. This prospect of a coming scandal was anything but pleasing to him in his official position. "It is not the fine," he added, "but the—the social complications. The whole thing should never have occurred."

"Then keep it from going farther." The Count irritably chewed his sandy moustache.

"How can I? We do not live under Louis XIV. The whole scandal will be in all the papers to-morrow. It comes as a Godsend to the Ministry, who at this moment, as you know better than I, are at war with the Court-party. They will make much of it. 'Scene at a Railway-Station!' 'A great Court Lady resists the Authorities!' Under ordinary circumstances the affair would be too insignificant to mention. At this moment it is almost a Political Event!"

Hilarius beat a tattoo on the border of the billiard-table. He listened but abstractedly to the rest of his brother's small-talk. He was anxious for an opportunity to be alone with his wife, and as soon as this presented itself—in her dressing-room, late that evening—all his pent-up vexation burst forth.

"And if the thing really becomes a weapon in the hand of the Radicals," he added, after repeating the information which Frederik had brought him, "I shall never hold up my head at Court again."

"Then stop it," said the Countess, toying with her bracelet. She spoke with seeming indifference, her

eyes on her arm, but a flush played over her sullen cheek.

"Frederik says that is not within his power."

"He wants to make himself important by magnifying the difficulty. I shall not ask him myself, but please tell him that I *expect* him to stop it. What else is one a judge for, even so stupid a judge as he?"

"Margherita!"

"Is he a genius, your brother? I had not perceived it."

"No, he is not a genius. Would that some other people were not." He ground his heel into the hearth-rug. "Heaven only knows to what this preposterous business may lead."

"If you mean me," she answered quietly, lazily lifting her handsome head, "I am not a genius. I am a fool. This is your good fortune. And mine. I cannot understand the little ways of your little country. I know nothing of your party-intrigues. But I am going to be a great Court lady, Hilarius. That was agreed when we married."

"You are setting about it in a rational manner!" he cried, and flung himself back against the mantel-piece.

She took no notice. "Who is the person responsible?" she asked.

"A man called Simmans, I understood Frederik to say."

"Ask him here." She shut her bracelet with a snap.

CHAPTER II.

A COUNTY-MAGNATE.

"AND now," said Count van Rexelaer to himself, as he slowly drew his chair towards the writing-table and made himself comfortable, "pleasure"—he pulled a face—"being over, I may give my mind to business at last."

It was true that pleasure was, for the moment, a thing of the past. The house had grown quiet again. The Calendar between the windows marked an early day in January. It was one of those calendars with a text for every day in the year, and his sister had given it him. Occasionally Count Hilarius's eyes would thoughtfully linger over the text.

The Freule van Rexelaer, the two brothers' only sister, was a timid maiden lady living in a small provincial town on a small income and doing a great deal of unnoted good with it. She had come to Deynum to see the old year out, having declined to share the Christmas gaieties, for the simple reason, which she wisely kept to herself, that to her mind the commemoration of the Nativity should be a religious festival. The great house and its splendours flurried her.

"Oh, how thankful I am," she said to Mevrouw

Elizabeth, "that I have not these servants to look after."

"Not *these* servants. No," replied Mevrouw Rexelaer-Borck with due emphasis. "But people with one servant are always afraid of them. I am not." She rested her crochet on one knee, looking over her nose at her thin little sister-in-law.

"Ah, but then you are such an excellent manager," said the old maid timidly.

"I certainly see a few things which escape Margherita's attention. No fear of her being worried, poor thing! Thank Heaven, *I* have eyes." Mevrouw van Rexelaer-Borck was always thanking Heaven, not so much for blessings received by herself, as for blessings withheld from her friends.

"Yes, my dear," replied the Freule quickly. "And I was telling you about the Coffee-stall Mission to Paris Cabmen;" and so she led the conversation on to safer ground. Mevrouw Elizabeth, who liked the philanthropy of circulars and Lady Patronesses and paragraphs in the press, was anxious to introduce the coffee stalls into the Hague, the only difficulty being the absence of cabstands. Perhaps these could be created.

Utterly dissimilar as the two ladies were, they had in common that sympathy of lifelong surroundings which no later intercourse can replace. They understood each other when they differed. Neither ever quite understood the foreign sister-in-law, even when they most appreciated her intentions. Fortunately the Countess did not court their friendship; she lay in the old Baroness's simple boudoir, and Laïssa read her

frequent bulletins from the Hague, sent by the maid who had charge of the pets. And sometimes they would consult the cards to find out when Mevrouw Rexelaer-Borck was going away. That lady once surprised them at such a moment and denounced the heathen superstition in no measured terms. "The wicked folly, Margherita!" she said. "Why, *I* could tell you as much about the future as these senseless bits of card." "I wish you would then," replied the Countess meaningly. Mevrouw van Rexelaer turned away in lofty scorn. "Does this creature understand English?" she asked. She especially disliked Laïssa as being more "exotic" even than the parrot. The mulatto looked up from the floor, with her great white grin. "Laïssa no understand," she said.

Reinout introduced everybody to the Chapel, in which he already took an especial pride. "I hope you will alter this, Hilarius," said the Freule van Rexelaer earnestly, after a silent survey of the chancel. And then she drew on her galochees again, because the floor felt damp.

Mevrouw Elizabeth had expressed herself with more commendable distinctness. "This popish mummary," she had said, bringing down a heavy hand on the altar, "of course must *go*. I wonder, girls, at your uncle having left it so long. And, good gracious, the flowers are—fresh!" Not even Mevrouw van Rexelaer's indignant stare could dim the pure sweetness of the chrysanthemums. Vrouw Poster had renewed them, according to custom. With an extra prayer for vanished Piet.

"Hilarius," said Mevrouw Elizabeth in the course

of the evening, "our dear Margherita has surely abjured the errors of her youth."

Hilarius coloured painfully. "What do you mean, Elizabeth?" he cried. "If your mother has been alking shameful slander——"

"I was alluding to the Scarlet Woman," interposed Mevrouw van Rexelaer hastily. "To the Beast," and then, in answer to his astonished stare: "Hilarius, how can you be so ignorant? I mean that your wife is no longer a Papist, but we must not underrate early influences, and there is positive danger in these popish surroundings. Unless you take care, you will have her going back to her bead-telling and bone kissing, or whatever the people do. I should not speak, if it were not for the risk to René. You know very well that the Jesuits have an eye exclusively to rich men's sons. Already the old priest here has made friends with the boy. He took Topsy to see the man, but I forbade her going again. He gave them sweets, Hilarius. Mark my words. He gave them sweets." Deep down in her heart she had an honest, though not clearly explicable, fear that the sweets—for the new heir of Deynum—might be poisoned!

Count Hilarius had been startled by her evident good faith. He had lived too long in a clime where all men acknowledged the same form of religion without practising any to take note of the flowers and frippery in a sacred edifice; he was too indifferent to understand much of the fierce yet tremulous distrust which still lingers, on the field of Alva's achievements, in the hearts of the degenerate children of a nation of martyrs. He had no large experience of pious women;

and yet he felt that Mevrouw van Rexelaer was not like his sister the Freule. But it does not require any very active piety to dread the idea of being burned alive.

As he now sat in the Baron's room, his eyes vaguely fixed on that old gentleman's guns, Hilarius reverted to Mevrouw Elizabeth's words. He wanted no complications, religious or otherwise. What he dreaded above all things was unpleasantness. It hampers one so.

His steward appeared before him, smooth and serene.

"I have been looking at the list of the tenants," said the Count, taking up a paper from the table before him. "Most of them I remember seeing at the New Year's Congratulation. A pleasing custom. Is it general in these parts?"

"At your service, Mynheer the Count," replied the steward. "It was always so in the old—time of your ancestors."

"But there are some names I cannot recall. Here, for instance, is a man called Hummel. Who is he?"

"He is old and bedridden," replied the steward. The man was a neighbour of his own, who often did him good service.

"Well. But here is a large farm, the Chalkhouse. I do not remember the people at all. 'Driest' the name is. What of them?"

The steward, who had long been expecting this question, coughed gently. "As Mynheer the Count pleases," he said.

"What do you mean? Why don't they come to pay their respects?"

"Because they are—Ah, I wish Mynheer would ask them himself—they have not the proper feeling of the other tenantry."

"You mean that they are dissatisfied with the new order of things?"

"If Mynheer the Count pleases to put it so."

"I understand. They pose as champions of the old régime. And the opposition—about our reception—ah, you see I know—had they a hand in that?"

"Mynheer the Count knows so much, it is improbable he should not know all."

The Count made a mark on his register. "Why were not the church-bells rung?" he asked suddenly.

The steward smiled a peculiar smile. "I am a good Catholic, Mynheer," he said. "The affairs of the church are not mine to control."

And then they discussed various matters pertaining to the estate. On these occasions Dievert found sufficient reason to regret the past, for the new master went into every item and never paid a penny without knowing what for. He even had no ready perception of the steward's all-conclusive argument that "it had always been so in the old Baron's time." Dievert understood that Count Hilarius was no gentleman.

They were still busy when Strum was announced. And the one man of business bowed himself out, as the other bowed himself in.

The Count liked the bowing. This was pleasanter than dancing attendance on his Majesty's representative

at the Court of the Sultan of Tierra del Fuego. Even pleasanter than living, as an officer of the Royal Household, in a dull house on the Orange-Canal, with a dark-visaged wife. There is no real greatness without the territorial element, the rent-roll, its votes and all its complicated influence. "In the same family, you know, for nearly a thousand years. Quite unique." Count Rexelaer felt kindly concerning his spouse.

"Sit down, Strum," he said with comfortable graciousness. The Notary considered that his new patron had dropped the "Mynheer" unconscionably soon. He recalled the time when the Baron was wont to say "Sit down, Strum," and when he had waited thus, on the edge of his chair, and cracking his fingers. He would still flush up to the roots of his red hair, by day or night, the great clumsy booby, when his thoughts reverted to the last visit here, and the insult he had received. He hated the Baron with relentless hate.

"I have been looking through the deed of purchase," said the Count, rousing himself, as Strum gave an awkward little cough. "It is plain enough. In his dying hours the thoughts of the Countess's venerable uncle were evidently all of her and her child. He was deeply attached to my little boy. That prohibitory clause,—how he must have chuckled over it!—well, it was a legitimate stratagem, the only means he had of eluding the Baron's vindictive opposition to myself."

Strum acquiesced, thinking to himself what bores these rich people were.

"The contract says the Chapel must remain as it

is. Now what do you take that to mean, my good Notary?"

"A Catholic place of worship, Mynheer the Count."

"Ah, it strikes you in that light because you are a Romanist yourself"—"A Romanist, if you will, but no bigot," began Strum—the Count waved his hand benignantly; he did not approve of being interrupted by his Notary—"to me it means 'a burying-place of the Rexelaers,'" he said.

Strum gave one of his sudden, sprawling kicks, causing the Count to start aside. The Notary understood perfectly what the other was driving at. "My father used to say," he answered slowly, "that in law every interpretation, however absurd, must be considered as if it might be correct."

"I do not consider this interpretation absurd," interrupted the Count. *He* might interrupt. "On the contrary, it is the only rational one."

"That is what I mean," answered Strum. He took off his spectacles and wiped them. And he blinked his eyes before the rising sun. Never mind, he might be as insolent as he chose to the Baron, in the shade.

"I sent for you," continued the Count, "to speak chiefly about another matter. Where is my cousin at present? Do you happen to know?"

"I believe the Baron is at Cleves," said Strum.

"I have an inventory here of the things he has taken with him. It is a great pity. They should have gone with the house. He must want money. You could not sound him on the subject?"

"I could write to him directly in your name, Myn-

heer the Count." A great leap of gratification crossed the Notary's face.

"I did not mean that. All these things are at present, I am told, at the parish priest's?"

"Yes, Mynheer the Count." Strum hated the Baron too much to willingly concede him so advantageous a market. The Baron's views on the matter he could not bring himself to understand.

"That is all," said Count Rexelaer. "Good-day." And to himself he added: "A very useless Notary."

Strum went home in a bad temper. But, then, interviews with the great always put him out of sorts. He was the worst kind of person for a Notary; other people's business bored him. "I am as good," he thought ceaselessly, "as any of these." At his core, therefore, he was dumbly overbearing, as many shy people are.

"Your father used to tell me everything," said his mother a little complainingly (a fond illusion on her part), "and he would bring me such sweet messages from the Baroness, and pots of her own orange-preserve."

"It must taste very bitter in her mouth, if she's got any left," said Strum.

"She was an Angel," protested his mother warmly. "I wonder if this new lady is also good."

"Good? Of course she is good. All great ladies are good, mother, without pro's or con's. It's only the honest, hard-working ones that have to prove their goodness."

"Nicholas, Nicholas," said Mrs. Strum, gently shaking her old head, "you are very different from your father."

Now these words from a mother—even from Mrs. Strum—bear a tacit reproach in them. Nicholas was not accustomed to reproach from his mother. But the “White Baroness” was that lady’s patron saint.

“We can’t all be like each other,” he grumbled roughly. “I’m as good a man of business as father was.”

“Oh yes, Nicholas. I know you are much cleverer,” said Mrs. Strum, as she took up her stocking again.

CHAPTER III.

THE TWO REINOUTS MEET.

COUNT HILARIUS found Reinout enjoying a series of lonely tumbles on the ice. The boy had reached that stage of skating when the tumbles are a dozen yards apart. His father called him to the side of the pond.

“René, I don’t want you to go and see this priest any more.”

“Father Bulbius? Oh, Papa, he is a dear old man. He has given me a live salamander. And he knows all about the Castle, and the people that used to live here. And he tells such beautiful stories. There was a little girl here once. Have you heard about Lady Bertha’s oak?”

“No. But I don’t want you to go and see him again. By the bye, did he ever speak to you about the Chapel in the Grounds?”

“Yes, Papa, the day after Christmas. He told me

it was the first time in five-and-twenty years that he hadn't said mass there on Christmas day. He looked very sorry; I thought he was going to cry."

"Just so. Now, Reinout, you will promise me never to go and talk to this man again. And there is another thing. I don't like your skating about in this manner all alone. You must always have one of the men with you. Now promise about the priest."

Such a sullen look spread over the boy's dark face that his father noticed it. "My dearest child," said Count Hilarius, drawing his son towards him, "cannot you believe that I am acting for your best? You are the sole hope and pride of my life, René, the one thing I love with all my heart. If anything happened to you——" his voice shook, "there would be nothing left worth living for."

Reinout stood silently looking down at his skates. Presently something drew up his eyes—rather against his will—to his father's bended face. And he said, illogically, but with great earnestness: "I will, Papa." Nevertheless, he was angry. Only the rare display of the Count's affection always melted his heart as sunshine tinges the snow. He loved his father, perhaps not quite as energetically as he loved Prince, because Prince and he understood each other so much better. But, then, Prince was a dog; the comparison was absurd. Reinout did not make it.

He called after Count Hilarius's retreating figure. "I must go and say goodbye, Papa," he said, "and explain."

The Count had a habit of considering his son's entire existence, in its pleasure and profit, from the

parental point of view. "No," he called back, "it would be better not. Explanations, Reinout, are usually a mistake!"

"Oh, but I shall," said Reinout to himself. Obedience has its limits, and the child's education, if it had taught him anything, had taught him that courtesy transcends it. He ran off in the direction of the village.

Already he had many friends in the village, where he had fraternised with the lame child first and then, through him, with the other boys. These country lads had a delightful acquaintance with the wondrous world around them, on whose threshold he stood entranced. And, although his intercourse with them might seem somewhat awkward, yet he was always splendid in his own queer way and certainly far preferred his new companions to the genteel children at the Hague who mocked "his gracious Majesty." The transfer to Deynum had given him a glimpse of reality: the Life of Nature, the Life Unmasked. He liked the face.

He threw a smile to Tony, behind the narrow cottage-panes, as he ran on towards the Parsonage. He had promised the boy an old box of soldiers of his own; he must bring it to-morrow. It was a beautiful thing to be rich and great and patronise. The threatening beggar had been quite wrong. The great lord shone at the Castle and the world beneath his feet lay flourishing in his smile. Monsieur de Souza had explained it all.

He ran through the Parsonage garden, round by the stables to the good Priest's study. He knew the way well by this time. But in the door he suddenly

checked himself. An old gentleman was sitting thoughtfully by the fire. The old gentleman looked up at the intruder, frowned, hesitated, and recovered himself.

"Father Bulbius is out," said the old gentleman shortly.

Reinout bowed and apologised, with that ready courtesy which young people found so exasperating, but which old ones were unable to resist in this our latter-day of ill-breeding.

As he was going, said the old gentleman with an effort: "I suppose they call you Reinout van Rexelaer?"

"Yes, Mynheer," replied Reinout.

"Father Bulbius has told me a great deal about you," said the Baron. And then he added, as if talking to himself. "But I pity the child!" and Reinout crept away bewildered.

The evening before, the good Father had sat, in all the cosiness of drawn curtains and howling winds, warming his feet against the stove and his hands around his glass of steaming grog. The kettle was singing its agreeable promise of more. Father Bulbius felt comfortable though lonely. For Veronica was away on her yearly visit to her friends in town.

"A holiday for me," Veronica used to say with some truth, "means two days of extra hard work." Undeniably, the catastrophe of the year in the Father's small household, whatever it might happen to be, would always choose the thirty-six hours of Veronica's absence to occur in. Nevertheless did she amply enjoy her

excursion on account of the manifold occasions for grumbling it was bound to afford. And the Father enjoyed his brief liberty in the pleasant prospect of her return.

He was sitting now luxuriating in the tranquil sadness of his reflections. There was much to grieve him in his present circumstances, and it pleased him to dwell thereon. The new master of Deynum, though indifference itself in all matters religious, had yet given encouragement, by the very fact of his Protestantism, to the persecuted heretics of the village. They were beginning to hold up their heads, and even—distinctly—to crow. And it was reported that the Baroness Borck of Rollingen—that Jezebel—had, during a state-visit at the Castle, succeeded in arousing its owner's interest by a terrible account of the poor "Beggars'" sufferings and the bad impression these sufferings had created in the neighbourhood. The Baroness Borck had been anxious for years to get a Protestant pastor appointed to Deynum, her own minister finding the double duty too heavy. Count Rexelaer, in his eagerness to conciliate the great people around him, would probably accede to her request, and a rival parsonage-house would arise on the village green. Meanwhile the Count had closed, and double-locked, the small chapel in the grounds.

Father Bulbius sighed, and gently sipped his grog. To-morrow evening Veronica would mix it. There would be less rum, but boiling water.

He was roused from his slumbrous regrets by a gentle knock at the front-door. It was ten o'clock, and an ugly, windy, snow-tormented night. He started

to his feet, hastily swallowing the too darkly coloured mixture; his one thought was that something must have happened to bring Veronica back. Only she seemed to him strangely patient, as he slowly stumbled to the door.

He opened it, and there stood the Baron van Rexelaer.

"How do you do, Bulbius?" said the Baron. "Anybody with you besides Veronica?"

Father Bulbius burst into tears.

"Tut, tut," said the Baron, and hastily walked into the Sanctum.

When Father Bulbius joined him there a moment later, he was standing in the middle of the room. He had taken the shade from the lamp and its full glare fell on all the piled-up lumber from the Castle. He looked much the same as ever, excepting that perhaps his bearing was a trifle more erect than in those last slow months of his suspense. As the priest stole in, he turned and replaced the lamp-shade. "Well, and how are you getting on?" he said. "Anything new in the village?" Oh yes, there were several things new in the village. Father Bulbius only muttered the name of some old creature recently dead.

"Dead," repeated the Baron meditatively: He walked up the room once, and down it again, and then, stopping abruptly: "May I take off my cloak?" he asked. Father Bulbius fell forward in the eagerness of his response. He hung up the Baron's hat, without knowing it, on one knight's protruding visor, and over another's mailed shoulders he carefully and awkwardly spread his patron's well-remembered, queer-fashioned

Inverness. The dead soldier looked worse than grotesque under his plaid-lined mantle; he looked dumbly insulted. The Baron went over and removed it.

"The damp, you know," he said apologetically, and began softly polishing the shining metal. Father Bulbius's soul burned with sudden shame.

He plied his guest with a number of questions, while pressing upon him the slippers he had just taken from his own feet. "I have others," he said, and went into his bedroom, and came back with a pair of galoches. And then, in sudden alarm at his overflow of curiosity, he excused it with the necessity of finding out the Baron's requirements. "And when has your Nobleness eaten last?" he said. "Ah, but I dread that the house contains nothing but bread."

"I want nothing, my friend," said Mynheer Rexelaer. "Mevrouw and the child are well, like myself. But how about Veronica? I miss her."

"Your Nobleness does her too much honour. She has gone to see her relations. Her usual visit, you remember."

"Oh certainly," replied the Baron. "I hope she will find her aunt in health. It is fortunate, perhaps, that she should not be here. Ah no, I forgot; it is unfortunate," he added, rising hastily, and making for the door.

Father Bulbius intercepted him with wonderful plump alacrity. "The room upstairs is ready," he said, "or will be in a minute. As for supper, I will run over and see if Hendrika——"

"No, no, my good Father. To tell you the truth I had not intended to disturb you. The last train hav-

ing brought me to Deynum, I found myself unexpectedly in your porch. But it is quite time I left you in peace, and so I am going away again." He got his cloak and hat, overhearing the Father's anxious "Whither?" and stumbled along the passage. The Father followed in desperation. "But shall I not see your Nobleness again?" he almost sobbed. Suddenly the other turned and caught both his hands. "I am behaving like a brute and a fool," he said thickly. "It is a great, true happiness to see your face again. May I stay, in spite of Veronica's absence? In spite of all the trouble I shall give?"

"Don't," replied the Father, vainly trying to steady the workings of his gutta-percha cheeks.

"But one thing you promise me. It is already past your bedtime. You go now, as if Veronica were here, and you leave me to sit up as long as I like—among these." He pointed to his re-found treasures.

"But there is so much to speak of," pleaded Bulbius.

"There is not," repeated the Baron, wearily reseating himself. "To tell truth, I feel nowise inclined for sleep. I may take a short turn presently; I like the snow. Never mind me. I shall not set the house on fire."

"The whole house is at your Nobleness's service," said Bulbius. He could say that, freely, for the next four-and-twenty hours. "But, see, Mynheer the Baron, it is not yet eleven?"

The Baron looked into his face and actually laughed: "And when was Father Bulbius ever known to resume his game"—he asked—"when once the Castle-clock"

—the laugh died from his voice—“had struck the hour of ten?”

“To-day,” said the Father boldly, spreading his fat fingers on the table, “to-day, if your Nobleness pleases, he will play as long as you like.”

“Nonsense, Bulbius, you never had a card in your house.”

For only answer the priest went to his cupboard. “I have been obliged of late,” he said apologetically, “to play a little *écarté* by myself of nights. But I find it very dull work.”

“So I can understand,” replied the Baron quite seriously, as he shuffled the cards. The old antagonists had settled down to their game, almost before they realized what they were doing. It came as a relief from a well-nigh unendurable strain.

The wind struck against the casement, as they bent by the lamp. Father Bulbius looked up apprehensively. “Only bluster,” said the Baron, “I mark the King.” And in another moment the player’s ambition had got hold of them and both were anxious to win. The Baron became so increasingly successful, that Father Bulbius could hardly resist feeling a little annoyed. But no interest in his cards could keep his sleepy head from nodding, and at one time he had six cards in his hand, and about midnight he revoked. Then the Baron got up. “Just a whiff of air!” he said. “It will do me good. Give me your key, Bulbius, and if I find you up when I come back, I depart for good and all, as, perhaps, I ought to have done at first. Good-night.”

The Father let him go and then set about preparing the guest-chamber. A couple of the most richly

framed lords and ladies, which had been deposited here, he dragged away, with much labour and some damage to gilding, into Veronica's chamber. "Let the poor gentleman sleep, if he can," he said; he knew well enough where the Baron was gone. He came down, wiping his hot face. There was oil in the lamp; the fire would smoulder on indefinitely. He sent up a little petition to his patron Saint to remind the hens of their duty for the morrow, and then—at last!—he sank on the bed, to await his guest's return, and in another moment was fast asleep.

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE LIGHT AND NEW DARKNESS.

MEANWHILE the Baron van Rexelaer walked rapidly through the wind and dark. He had waited for the dark. "I shall take the last train," he had said to the Baroness, "and go to the inn. So doing, I shall see nobody till to-morrow."

"Why?" asked the Baroness. She could not understand this postponement of the inevitable. The quiet lady had steeled her heart in reposeful pride.

But the Baron, although unable to explain himself, felt that between to-day and to-morrow, if we live by emotions, would lie a long period of time. He must first see the place again, alone; he must fight his fight. When he had hurried away, three months ago, he had hoped never to return. Which of us, having buried our dead out of our sight, would bid love lift the coffinlid?

"I *must* consult with Bulbius, but I shall not go up to the Castle." This thought had repeatedly risen to his lips; he had checked it; he did not want his courageous wife to consider him a coward. He crossed over to her and kissed her on the forehead where she sat in her high-backed chair by the poor little Pension-window.

That was not much more than half-a-dozen hours ago. He had promised his wife to eat something on his arrival; he did not like breaking even a trivial promise to his wife. He ought not to have minded giving Bulbius a little trouble. "I *am* a coward," thought the good gentleman, as he walked on through the silence. After midnight all Deynum, except its watchman, was asleep. Sometimes the watchman also.

In another moment he passed under the shadow of his own trees. Here the night lay pitchy dark, in spite of the driving snow, which melted as it fell. The Baron, hastening unhesitatingly on, emerged into the avenue. Then, suddenly, he became aware of a light approaching at the farther end and stopped, disconcerted. Should he go back? As he stood staring stupidly at this twinkle in the distance, he became aware that it was stationary, and then he understood. An innovation. A lantern by the bridge. And in that small discovery the hopelessness of his loss fell upon him as it had never fallen before.

"They need not have broken their necks any sooner than we did," he muttered, bitterly. And presently he stood beside the water, shrinking from the tell-tale brightness of a varnished street-lamp of Margherita's erecting. Another glimmered half-way down the "Cour

d'honneur." Right opposite towered the black mass of the Castle, with the wind howling round it, a melancholy wail.

The snow, which had been falling all night in fitful sweeps, now slowly checked itself, and, among lifting clouds, the outlines of the stately building stood dimly forth in a changeful play of light and shade. And instantaneously the whole of it, each nook and angle and curl of tracery, shone out into the darkness, illumined by his love. We are but sensuous creatures; talk as we will of visions of the mind, we see with our poor physical sight and with very little else. He stood staring, staring, as if his eyes could never drink their fill, and then a veil crept over them. When he looked again, the vision was newly shrouded in darkness; only a dull broad shaft still fell, from where the clouds were closing, across old Atlas, on the topmost pinnacle, bending beneath his world of cares. Another moment, and this ray also had sunk from sight; the snow began to thicken upon the lessening wind. With a shuddering sigh the Baron turned to go. Ever afterwards he remembered that parting glimpse of the patient hero, beneath the drooping sky.

"Away," he said softly.

He crossed the sward, not without anxious glances towards the windows, behind which Hilarius and Margherita were peacefully slumbering, and crept towards the Holy Walk. Before returning to the Parsonage he must stand for one brief moment—and one brief prayer—among the dead in their unbroken rest. That alone would calm him. "I am a vainglorious old fool to have come," he told himself. And he thought

of that repose which no agony of wounded pride can ruffle, and which comes so soon to all.

No light was burning in the chancel. He tried the door; it was locked. Never had the lamp hung thus extinguished during all the years the Baron could recall. "They light up their own yard!" he said aloud, "God help me; I am becoming the bitterest of men!"

Half an hour later he was back in Father Bulbius's sanctum. Walking on tip-toe, he softly stirred the dying embers and drew forward a chair. The lamp burned low. The clock on the mantelpiece struck half-past one. And the sound suddenly told him that the stable-clock at Deynum had not struck while he was out. He rose in some perturbation, wondering if anything could be wrong with it. And then he laughed; what was Count Rexelaer's stable-clock to this stranger and sojourner?

No, he was more than that. Come what might, he was still the last of Deynum's historic lords. He straightened himself in his seat, and then, drawing a bunch of keys out of his pocket, opened an oak chest which stood near. The keys of the Castle he could lose and had lost, but not these.

Presently Father Bulbius, awakening in dismay and discomfort, saw a light streaming through the chinks, and seized his unloaded revolver. And then he remembered that he himself had left the lamp on the table. "Dear me," he said. "I must have had a few minutes' nap," and he rolled off the bed, and was making for the door when his attention was arrested by the rustle of paper. Letting himself down somewhat laboriously to the keyhole, he saw in the gathering gloom of

the silent study the Baron van Rexelaer, with parchments and papers heaped untidily around him, a yellow charter upon his knee. The Father crept back softly into bed.

CHAPTER V.

THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE.

"NEXT morning, over their frugal breakfast, the Baron explained to Bulbius the object of his coming. On leaving Deynum he had still lacked fifty thousand florins to pay off his debts. This money, not being able to touch the "Lady's Dole," he had found himself obliged to borrow at ruinous interest, for six months. Not to have done so would have meant bankruptcy, disgrace.

"Bankruptcy is not always disgrace," interposed the Father, who prided himself on his knowledge of the world. "Yours would not have been."

"This loan, in any case, must be paid off," said the Baron, "before it reduces us to beggary. So I have made up my mind to sell whatever trumpery I still possess. I can't help it. It's no use fighting any longer against fate."

What could the Father reply? Three months ago he had advocated this sale. And the Baron had answered: Never to the one man who would buy. Father Bulbius regretted the Baron was so bad a man of business.

Confessor though he was, he knew nothing of his

patron's money-transactions. Do we ever confess? Even to ourselves?

"No use fighting against fate," repeated the Baron thoughtfully, and then suddenly he burst out: "Observe my strange experience with the Marquis de la Jolais! I cannot make him out at all. It looks as if he did it on purpose. And if so, he acted a lie."

"I fear that is the only explanation, Mynheer," assented Father Bulbius mournfully.

"So the Baroness tells me, and the Baroness is always right. But I cannot understand it! A la Jolais! Surely gentlemen do not lie!"

The Baron held a view—not a theory, for he did not consciously theorise—that men were turned out in groups, like machine-made statuettes. A soldier was a soldier; a sailor a sailor, and so on. Each group had its inevitable virtues—and vices, but the Baron noticed the virtues most.

He was agitated now; all references to Count Rexelaer's vile stratagem or marvellous good fortune upset him. Father Bulbius stole away on the plea of ordering some dinner from Hendrika, the landlady. It was during his absence that Reinout unexpectedly appeared before the Baron, Reinout, whose praises the Father had discreetly brought forward by an occasional word in a letter, a word that said little and left much to be divined. "I pity the child," said the Baron. He did not allude to the subject when the Father came back. Together they began looking over the scattered heirlooms and appraising them. Some of the pictures were valuable; the costliest plate had already been disposed of before. Both realized, with growing dis-

tinctness, that fifty thousand florins is a very large sum.

They were so occupied that a loud ring at the front door came upon them with a start of alarm. "Possibly a tramp," said the Father. The villagers usually went round to the back, there to be barked at by the now absent Veronica. Nobody ever rang.

With rumpled hair and dusty cassock Father Bulbius went to open the door. His grumble changed to an uncomfortable smile of recognition in the presence of Count Hilarius van Rexelaer. That gentleman had never called at the Parsonage before.

"This way, if you please. This is my 'state'-room, Heer Count," cried the Father in a flurry, shutting one door and opening another. The visitor entered an apartment whose chill glories—the pride of Veronica's cleansing—froze the marrow in his bones. Count Hilarius was a Southernized Hollander. He looked round in dismay.

"Take a seat, Mynheer the Count," said the Father, benignly.

The Count's teeth chattered. He had intended to be circumspect, but the cold made him forget his diplomacy. "I came to ask you, Mynheer," he said brusquely, "about the articles which have been removed from the Castle and which you have in your keeping."

"They were excluded by the contract, Mynheer," cried Bulbius in a flutter.

The Count arched his sandy eyebrows. "I should hardly have waited so long," he said, "had that not been the case. But I am anxious, if possible, to acquire them. Strum says all the cupboards are locked, but I

should like to see the other things." He paused inquiringly.

"That is quite impossible," replied Father Bulbius with a vehemence born of agitation. "I may show them to no one."

Count Hilarius felt the cold settling on his bald head. He put on his hat, and he also rose from the red velvet sofa.

"You misapprehend me," he said stiffly. "I wish only to see the pictures, the armour, etcetera. All these things are heirlooms which should remain with the family, and should never have left the Castle. I am going to offer my cousin, Baron Rexelaer, to repurchase them."

"I can show you nothing, Mynheer the Count," repeated Bulbius in a tremble. "I am very sorry. It is quite out of the question." Would his visitor never go?

But the visitor, who had only been one moment in the house, already felt quite willing to leave it. He was furious at this behaviour from his parish priest, and he hurried out into the hall, drawing his fur-coat around him.

In his haste—or was it done intentionally?—he threw open the wrong door and walked straight into the Sanctum. The Baron was not there—Bulbius gave a gasp of relief—but the whole room was littered with his treasures.

Count van Rexelaer's eyes travelled slowly over the open cupboards and boxes and their scattered contents. At last they arrested their pale gaze on the Father's burning face, and Bulbius read an accusation in them which was simply monstrous.

"I had understood that these receptacles were locked," said Count Rexelaer at last. "If their owner left them in this peculiar condition, he cannot have attached much importance to their contents."

Father Bulbius felt utterly annihilated.

"If," repeated the Count with unmistakable stress. Meanwhile his eyes literally danced and gloated over all these glories of his house. He had never beheld any of them before.

"The Baron begged me to arrange them," stammered Bulbius.

"Indeed? And do you do so every day?" Count Hilarius was furious to think of these inestimable splendours abandoned to an ignorant and unscrupulous priest. He had brought away with him from Rio the conviction that all priests were unscrupulous. He stamped his foot in his agitation. "I distinctly understood from Strum," he continued, "that these cases were locked."

"You accuse me of neglecting my trust, Mynheer?" cried the Father, losing patience.

"I said no such thing. Had I wished to do so, I should not have used the word 'neglecting.'"

"Violating, perhaps?" screamed the Father, bounding like a fiery ball. He cast prudence to the winds. O this Protestant upstart! All the wrongs of the flock flared up in the shepherd's heart, like tallow round a wick.

"You forget yourself," said the Count stiffly. "I came here because I am anxious Baron Rexelaer should be informed of my offer to purchase these articles for which he can have no further accommodation.

If that be part of your duty as a caretaker"—he had all a little soul's spite, and was now intentionally insulting—"have the goodness to transmit my message immediately. I should certainly have preferred, if possible, his answering me himself." He leant against the same inlaid gentleman who, the night before, had resented the Baron's Inverness, and his eyes rested scornfully on the Father.

"He will do so at once," said a cold voice behind him. "Would you have the kindness to lean less heavily, Mynheer?" A gray gentleman,—gray of hair, not only, but of face and eyes—stood in a door which had suddenly opened in the wall. Count Rexelaer knew immediately who the strange gentleman was. "I—I," he stammered, altogether disconcerted, "I was not aware—I am Count Rexelaer."

"I could not help hearing you, Mynheer, from the adjoining room. I am the owner of this lumber. It seems simpler to tell you at once that I shall never sell any of it to *you*."

All the words were calmly polite, excepting that final, over-emphasized "you." "But why?" pleaded the other, somewhat recovering his sangfroid. "The things are wanted at Deynum. They have left horrible, noticeable gaps"—a flash of satisfaction died across the Baron's eyes—"and as head of the family——"

"Stop," interrupted Baron Rexelaer in a voice of thunder. "God knows I do not wish to be discourteous, but never shall I allow you to use those words to my face!"

"The higher title——" burst in Count Hilarius fiercely, while Father Bulbius shrank aside.

"Pooh!" said the Baron more calmly. "Money, even such money as yours, Mynheer, can buy almost all things nowadays. But it cannot buy—and you know it cannot—one drop of the blood of these." He laid his hand quite gently on the shoulder of the knight beside him. To him, at that moment, the empty armour was a living presence. "There, there," he continued softly. "I have no wish to insult you. I cannot give you these things, because you would make them live a daily lie. Surely you can understand that. If you like, you may have the silver; your father, wrongly enough, was permitted to assume our arms, and you may buy the forks and spoons."

"And the archives?" cried the Count.

Mynheer van Rexelaer looked at him and smiled.

"I will take nothing!" screamed Hilarius. "Mind you, you"—he turned to Bulbius—"and you! I came here in all charity to see what could be done. It is unwise to anger me. Rexelaer or not, I still am Lord of Deynum." He ran out into the passage. This time he found the front-door.

"Of course he is not of the family," said Bulbius, wiping his face. "How could I ever think he was?"

"I am sorry," said the Baron.

Count Hilarius ran home in a rage, and, as misfortunes never come singly, he was stopped in his own park by a man who had evidently been waiting for him there.

"A word with you," said the man.

The Count drew back. He was no craven.

"Let me pass," he said haughtily.

"One moment. This girl. The child lives."

"What girl?" cried the Count impatiently.

"Villain, have you such wealth of choice? Dora Droste."

"I know nothing of what you mean," replied the Count, endeavouring to push past. "Who are you? You have no business in this park."

"You know who I am. I have told you before. Not that it matters. I have nothing in common with the girl but her misfortune." The fellow, a miserable-looking creature, held one lean arm across the path.

"If you want to extort money, you won't get it," said the Count, pressing forward.

"You will do nothing for the girl?"

"No." Count Rexelaer lifted his cane.

The fellow struck it aside and, in doing so, knocked over his puny antagonist, saw him topple back into the slush, and ran off and out of sight.

CHAPTER VI.

"ALL THE COMFORTS OF A HOME."

THAT night the Baron went back to Cleves.

An hour or two before his arrival Wendela sat strumming wearily on the boarding-house piano. It was a very bad piano, but this, to Wendela, was no additional affliction.

"One, two, three," counted the Baroness. "Wendela, you are not keeping time."

"Oh, what does it matter, Mamma? The tune comes right all the same."

"Not to those who distinguish properly. I thought it was my daughter's ambition to do everything well?"

"So it is, Mamma. Oh dear; one, two, three!" And Wendela paddled on.

Presently a nervous little Swiss body thrust her head through the door, then drew back with a couple of openings and shuttings, and finally entered and sat down. Many people cannot enter a public sitting-room in any other way. "Shall we be disturbing you, Mademoiselle?" asked the Baroness. "Not in the least," replied the little lady, in much trepidation certainly saying the reverse of what she meant. Fräulein Drix was "exceedingly musical," and as Wendela's ten fingers went staggering over immovable stumbling-

blocks, the poor creature vibrated behind the Review she was endeavouring to read.

The clock struck, and the musician dropped the piano-lid with a bang, which covered her mother's sigh of relief. The piece Wendela had been playing was Haydn's "Surprise." Very surprised would he have been to hear it was his.

"Do you consider it advisable, Madame," said Fräulein Drix, in a flutter of sudden resolve, "that *all* children should be taught the piano?" Wendela, who was gathering her books together, paused to listen. The Fräulein gasped at her own temerity, as she met the stare of the Baroness's pale eyes. Pale eyes can look haughtier than dark ones, and it was the one lady's look which answered the other. Aloud Mevrouw van Rexelaer merely said: "I like my daughter to learn it," in leaving the room. The doctor remarked next morning that Fräulein Drix was not so well.

The Baroness was white to the lips as she took her usual seat by the window. She was a woman of immeasurable pride; she had always been accustomed to a tranquil supremacy of gentle patronage, unassuming, doubtless, where only condescension was required. Seclusion—intermediary servility,—it is the one great blessing which rank and wealth bestow. The Baroness knew little of the world outside her, till she differed with "Auguste" about the cleanness of the dinner-plates. Nor did she know too much of the world within her—what stronghold still lay there unconquered—till intercourse with the ladies of Frau Schultze's second-rate Pension came unpleasantly to her assistance. She loathed the little, squalid, quarrelsome life.

"But Mamma," began Wendela abruptly. "Perhaps she is right. I hate playing. And you said yourself I had an excellent voice."

"Your ear must be trained first, Wendela; it is far too imperfect. Allow your mother to judge. And do you remember: Seed-time is my time: Harvest-time is God's."

Wendela threw her arms round her mother's neck with a warmth of embrace which would have astonished Fräulein Drix: "I wonder whether it ever really happened," she said, "Guido van Rexelaer casting his seed on the submerged fields in the Spanish troubles, and the harvest coming up just the same. Tell me about it again, Mother. When you tell me, it sounds true."

"Of course it is true. How often have I not told you before?"

"Yes, I know. But, it all seems too beautiful to be real. Beautiful things never really happen, I think. It's only the ugly, and nasty and wicked that come true." The girl spoke with passionate conviction, shaking back the brown locks from her honest brow. Then, suddenly, she embraced her mother again with vehement hugs and kisses. "You tell me, mother," she repeated, "about good things, and God, and the Saints. When you tell me it sounds true, and I think I understand."

"Hush, hush," answered the Baroness, gently disengaging herself. "My little daughter must not wish to understand too much. Go and wash your hands, dear child; it is nearly time for supper."

Wendela ran off to her own room, a pale-cheeked, earnest-eyed child, impetuous of thought and movement, yet dreamy withal. In the hideousness of the present, the dream-life had deepened around her as a sheltering cloud. Nurturing her beauty-sick soul upon the splendours of fairy tales, she had escaped into regions of blissful unreality, where she delighted to wander, in endless imaginings, with a fairy hero of her own creating, to whom she did homage as her lord. Of course he was handsome, though she had never distinguished his features, virtuous as one of her mother's saints, and as a lion strong.

She would not have been a daughter of her race had she not identified this fairy-prince with one of her own great ancestors; he was Pilgrim van Rexelaer, the "Knight Pilgrim," whose marble effigy sleeps in the Chapel (its visor closed in its saintly humility), the Crusader to whom the modern version of the family legend ascribes the deliverance of the maiden Wendela. Not for one moment did the girl's strong brain confuse the actual and the unreal. All things existent, as she had said to her mother, were ugly and evil; she deliberately turned her back upon them and roved away into the mystic forest, where a Saracen Chieftain pounced forth from behind the pine-trees and Knight-Pilgrim came riding up on a milk-white steed.

"For shame, Wanda!" said her mother, entering. "The supper-bell has rung!"

Wendela tumbled off the bed: "Oh, Mamma," she said, "I wish you need never have disturbed me. I was so happy, over yonder, in the wood. In the dear wood."

The Baroness knew nothing of her daughter's dreamings, except that she was too often dreamy, but it did not require any such knowledge to understand the allusion to Deynum. "God sends us the present to live in, not the past," she said. "Get ready, child, and come down."

They went into the supper-room together, and there they found the meal and its appendages awaiting them:—tea, made from hay, fat liver-sausage and frizzling potato-pancake, and, furthermore, half a dozen superfluous-looking personages who talked, dismally, at intervals, about the weather and about themselves. "Superfluous-looking," because there really seemed no reason why any of these creatures should exist, excepting the fact that each of them probably possessed a pittance to spend upon herself and thus to keep herself carefully, grumblingly and uselessly alive. Before the repast was concluded, Mynheer van Rexelaer joined the party and was greeted with a little cackle of interest. Most of the ladies felt a certain tenderness for the good "Herr Baron"; true, he was married.—My dear, if you will shut the door, we will have a talk about that wife of his—he was married, undeniably, but he was the only gentleman in the house. As a rule, he gave them very little satisfaction. To-day, again, after lengthening periods of silence, they picked themselves up one by one, and carried themselves away, for thus only can the manner be described in which they departed from the table with their various shawls, work-bags and other weaknesses.

Even when left alone with his wife and child, the Baron did not break through his reserve. He con-

fined his brief utterances to the incidents of the journey, and answered all questions with reluctance. "But I want to know everything about everything," said Wendela. He told her that her pets at the Castle had been disposed of: "Then I want to hear nothing about nothing any more," said the girl. A year ago she would have burst into a passion of crying; now she sat gazing silently, until, with an especially affectionate farewell to the Baroness, she wished her parents good-night. There was a barrier between her and her father, unrealized, though not altogether unfelt, by him, unacknowledged by her.

The Baron took up the little German "Tageblatt." Presently he said, without lifting his eyes from it: "I hope you have been comfortable during my absence?"

"Oh yes, we are comfortable. How can you ruin your eyes, mon ami"—the Baroness did not read German—"by this wretched light? The lamp smells again; the woman refuses to clean it."

The Baron laid down the newspaper. He sat shading his face with his hand, and presently he said, as one who thinks aloud: "The old home."

Madame van Rexelaer dropped her cards. "Tell me," she said, "I am longing to know. It is that still."

He drew back his hand quickly and looked full at her. "Is it?" he said eagerly. "To you?"

"I envy you, dearest, for having seen it again."

He started to his feet. "Would you," he said in a trembling voice. "Could you——" He remained looking dumbly at his wife, unable to proceed.

She stretched out both her arms to him. "Come here to me," she said. "It is the one thing I have been longing for, but not daring to ask."

And thus it was that the old Rexelaers came back to live at Deynum.



CHAPTER VII.

THE BORCKS.

THE village meanwhile had got accustomed to the new ones.

As, day after day, the green shutters were flung open, to the slow rising of the winter-sun, all round the weather-beaten sides of the Castle, those villagers whose errands brought them up to the offices gazed in pleasant approval of the fact that these numerous eyes still smiled down upon them and their merchandise. The saying had been that the family was only coming for Christmas. They were still here, and Joost Hakkert's monthly bill alone exceeded a hundred and fifty florins. Joost Hakkert was delighted. The Baron had left no debts, it is true, but he had always paid slowly while buying little; Count Rexelaer's ready money came pouring into the village, and the village, as it felt, smelt, jingled and crackled it, hurrah'd for Count Rexelaer. One morning the tailor met Hakkert's youngest son in the Castle-courtyard bending beneath his basket-load of meat. "And does your father still insult the strangers?" he asked in passing. The foolish, beefsteak-faced lad stopped and stared.

One class there was which had full cause to regret the White Baroness. It is a large one, and at Deynum that

lady had perhaps unnecessarily enlarged it. Margherita, on her part, had no wish not to be charitable, but that very common attitude is of little practical avail. The Count entrusted his systematised charities to Dievert, and every gentleman who has found out his steward (some, alas, have not yet done so) will understand what that meant. Dievert now often deplored that he had not had the management of the old Baron's largesse.

Meanwhile a whole regiment of workmen were busy all over the Castle, and herein he could find sufficient cause for rejoicing. Margherita, who possessed genuine taste and considerable knowledge of the lower forms of art, had thrown herself, with fitful energy, into the work of renovation and re-decoration, and her husband did not check her capricious expenditure, although, unfortunately for Dievert, he checked the resultant bills. He was glad to afford some relief to the melancholy which would settle on the Creole's face as she stood looking forth on the ice-bound moat, and the snow and the scraggy trees. Much as she had complained at the Hague, she had never yet understood how wintry winter is. Would she go back? Ah no; she had a nervous dread, at this moment, of the city's tittle-tattle about the "Scene at the Railway Station," which was being diligently worked by the "Rads." Margherita had plenty of passion at her command for a fine burst of emotion, but she could not stand the wear of a lagging, nagging annoyance.

After a few weeks Mevrouw Elizabeth van Rexelaer returned to her relations at the Castle. She brought Jane with her, and also Cécile Borck, her dead brother's

child, a shy, simple-hearted girl. Grandmamma Borck had her dear friend, the Countess de. Bercy, staying with her, and Cécile's presence hampered their talk. In spite of her orphanhood and modesty, Cécile was not a nobody in the Borck family; her father had misallied himself to one of the Koopstad Lossells and had left her fifty thousand pounds in the funds. Grandmamma looked after her and them.

She came, therefore, to see, and be seen of, her cousins, the Borcks of Rollingen, and Mevrouw Elizabeth, her aunt (who had missed the dear people at Christmas), ostensibly did the same. The new owners of Deynum were glad of this bridge of communication with their powerful neighbour, but they would hardly have tolerated Mevrouw Elizabeth's early reappearance, had not other considerations come to the fore. Young Simmans, the functionary charged with the Countess's "procès-verbal," was very intimate at the house of Judge Rexelaer; he was even credited with aspiring to the hand of the Freule Jane. Had Jane been less plain, this presumption would have been resented, for Simmans was nobody's son but his father's.

"When you are down there," said the Dowager to her daughter, "you can write to Henry Simmans to come and see you and find out the facts from Margherita. She is a fool. I barely know her, but you can tell her so from me. In my youth the populace took pleasure in the noble arrogance of their superiors; the times have changed, and the best thing for us to do is to keep as quiet as we can. Like the rich Jews of the Middle Ages that used to wear the filthier rags. From the height of my eighty years' experience I say:

Society scandals to-day are society suicides, and should be punished by society as such." She struck her cane on the floor, and sat angrily twitching her poor old mouth, which was fallen in over her peaked chin. She was seventy-three, but her daughter knew better than to contradict her. She had been thirty till she was fifty, and had then leaped into precipitate old age.

"Live as badly or as madly as you will," she added, after a moment, "but build your park-walls high."

"Quite so," said Mevrouw Elizabeth, who was nothing if not practical. "And I shall take down Jane, Mamma, and I might also take Antoinette. Dear René is so attached to Antoinette."

"They are children," replied the Dowager. "I have never paid much attention to the attachments of children. But, by all means, take Jane. It will be dull enough for Simmans."

"We shall have him proposing from ennui," laughed Mevrouw Elizabeth, with an attempt at playfulness which did not at all "suit her style."

"As most men do," retorted the Dowager.

So Mevrouw van Rexelaer departed for Deynum with Jane and Cécile, the Countess having declined the pleasure of Topsy's company, "because Reinout was once more occupied with his lessons." "As if I could not have brought Miss Wilson," said Reinout's disappointed aunt. Jane had pulled a face at the prospect of more Deynum in winter. "You can draw, you know," suggested her plump sister Rolline. "Yes; that's what I'm taken for," said plain-spoken Jane.

The Borcks of Rollingen called the day after their cousin's arrival, most unfortunately missing the Count,

who had left for a period of "duty" at the palace. They were almost cordial to *Mevrouw Elizabeth*, and gracious to *Margherita*. "And was that dark, olive-complexioned boy, the Countess's son?"—the lady from *Rollingen* put up her eye-glass. "He is very handsome; do you not think so, John? He understands French? Oh, never mind; plenty of people will tell him that." "I am glad we are co-religionists," she said to *Margherita* in parting, not knowing, or forgetting, the Countess's change of creed. She promised to call again.

Margherita "did not care," as long as she knew people to bow to. Just now she was entirely engrossed by the construction of a glass excrescence to her sitting-room, which would hang like a huge balcony over the moat. She took her visitors to see this. "It does not match a bit with the rest of the fortress-like building," said *Elizabeth*. "It does not," admitted the lady of *Rollingen*, frankly. *Margherita* knew that better than her visitors, but she must have a corner for her plants and her pets. "Did *Mevrouw Borck* like pets?" *Mevrouw Borck* detested them, and had fortunately not observed the recumbent *Florizel*, who had soiled the train of her dress during the visit. It was *Cécile* who timidly hinted, in her desire to say something kind, that houses built out of the water were known to be less damp than houses beside it. The *Baroness Borck*, tactless as she herself was, lifted her perpetual eye-glass and looked kindly at this young bearer of her name. "You must come and stay with us some day, my dear," she said. "We ought to know you better." *Cécile* blushed crimson: "I should be delighted, *Mevrouw*, but I am always with grandmamma *Borck*." The Baron of

Rollingen said little about the visit on the way home. Once only he opened his eyes, in the midst of his wife's chatter. "A tragedy in six words," he said. "I am always with grandmamma Borck."

And Harry Simmans came down to the Castle, to visit Mevrouw Elizabeth, and the Count asked him, after dinner, to stay for a day or two. Margherita took no notice. The weather being milder, the transfer of the tropical birds had been sanctioned by their medical attendant. They travelled down in glass cases, heated by spirits of wine.

"They are all that is left me of home," said the Countess. She cried as she let them loose in the "ex-crescence."

The Countess's only son, meanwhile, released from his early solitude, made friends with all the animate and inanimate world around him. As long as his tutor remained away, he multiplied unpleasant pets and fraternized with village urchins; Monsieur de Souza, on his return, represented this terrible state of affairs in no measured terms to the Count. "René s'encanaille." The words fell like a thunderbolt. It was the one thing which his whole education had been destined to avoid. The poor boy, who had been debarred from the friendship of his equals, found pleasure in the society of such children as could not distinguish his peculiarities. The Count listened horror-struck. "René s'encanaille."

"He never reads," said the Countess. "Intercourse with great minds is the sole education. I have always said so. Go into the library, René." And Reinout,

who felt bored, wandered away, with his hands in his pockets, along the endless lines of books.

"Ma chère, I regretfully disagree with you," said the Count, following his wife into her boudoir. "The boy will get no good from all the rubbish in there. I never read through half a dozen books in my life, except when I was working for my degree. Reinout is to enter the diplomatic service. And for that he is being fitted as few men have been. He is learning by De Souza's experience what others have to learn by their own."

"Of course he will become a diplomatist," replied Margherita, languidly arranging some striped camellias. "But that is only the background. My son is to be more than that—a prophet, a teacher, an immortal!"

"Eh?" said the Count. "Oh, you mean: verses. Don't put foolish ideas into his head, Margot. Literature wouldn't keep you in bonbons, and, besides, it isn't work for a gentleman."

"And Hugo, then, who is a Count? And Musset? And Châteaubriand? And Larmartine?"

"Châteaubriand?" repeated the Count. "He is a beefsteak—or he invented one, or something. What has he to do with René?"

"Go back to your——diplomatic avocations," replied the Countess quietly. "And leave me to build up the future glory of my child."

"But why not?" said Van Rexelaer carelessly, looking at his watch. "As long as you make a gentleman of him first."

The Countess Margherita dashed her flowers violently to the ground. "Gentleman! Gentleman!" she repeated,

"I am sick of the refrain, and you, Monsieur le Comte, I suppose *you* are a type of a gentleman?"

"But—Margherita——"

She came close to him. Involuntarily he shrank back. "A gentleman," she said, "is a man who breaks all the commandments — genteelly, and who keeps his —linen scrupulously clean." And she quitted the room.

Hilarius was left standing opposite his own rather stupid face in the glass. "Follies!" he said, and went to keep his appointment with—never mind.

Surely no woman was ever wholly bad. Surely not even the best of men was ever entirely worthy of a good woman.

Reinout loitered to and fro along the great, dim library. The weather was dreary outside, in the drip of a wide-spread thaw. There had been no books at the Hague, except his mother's boxes of novels. Novels were not books. These latter were for schoolmasters, professors and such-like. He now pulled out one or two from curiosity, philosophical works of eighteenth-century Frenchmen.

"Merci, Maman," he said, with a yawn, as he replaced them. He knew, disastrously, that his father thought his poetastic mother a fool.

He knew also that they differed about himself. Even now, as he left their presence, he had heard the Count begin: "Ma chère, I regretfully disagree with you——" A moment before he had had to endure the most vehement reproaches on account of his intercourse with the village-lads. Count Hilarius had been irritably violent, seeking offence where Reinout felt there was

none. The boy considered himself aggrieved by the thought that his father was constantly stopping him somewhere.

Still with his hands in his pockets, he wandered into a little nondescript turret-chamber, where he found Cécile engaged at an old piano. His was not a deeply musical nature, but at this moment the melodious majesty of Beethoven swept solemnly upon his sullen mood.

He stood listening, and when she paused and looked at him—with those kind gray eyes of hers:

“What do you do, Freule,” he asked suddenly, “when you don’t understand?”

“How so, René?” This, evidently, was a case in point.

“About what people want you to do, I mean. And what you ought to.”

“I ask God,” said Cécile softly.

“Dear me! I thought you were too old to say your prayers!”

The young Freule’s eyes grew troubled, and she looked as if she were anxiously searching for fit expression. But she only blushed and murmured “Poor René.”

Reinout wandered off into the hall. Why did all good people pity him? Ever since he could remember, Monsieur de Souza had called him “Fortune’s Favourite.”

He went up to his afternoon lessons. Tutor and pupil were reading together the memoirs of a Gentil-homme de la Chambre of Louis le Bien-aimé. Reinout

thought it dull work. He was blasé at fourteen. But that was what the Count had always wanted: "There is no strength in the world," said Count Rexelaer, "equivalent to beginning life blasé."

But it had never struck him that Reinout, weary of his great world's littleness, might look out for another. Count Rexelaer did not know there was another world.

CHAPTER VIII.

HONEST HEARTS.

THE Chalk-house Farm was sinking to sleep under the dying day. Across its low brown roof the massive shadows broadened, seeming to pull down the heavy thatch, like a night-cap, over little windows, that blinked drowsily, black against the fading light. The few gaunt beeches which overtop the prostrate building stretched out their straggling arms to Heaven, in appeal for a covering too long withheld. Heaven answered by dropping its clouds among them and gradually wiping them out of sight. In the red-brick court-yard, between the bake-house and the living-house, a belated chicken was nervously over-doing its supper, if meals can be distinguished in a chicken's twelve hours' uninterrupted feed. A brown mongrel lay by the door and, occasionally opening one eye, stared vaguely at the four poles of the empty hay-stack. Over the whole landscape hung a gloomy calm. The gloom, not the calm, hung over Lise, who stood waiting by the long white fence which separates the farm-yard from the high-road.

Her mother came out into the twilight with a bright blue milk-pail. "He'll know soon enough, child," she said. "You needn't be in a hurry to tell him."

"Don't mother," said the girl. Young people have no taste for irony. Lovers least of all.

"But of course your father knows best," continued Vrouw Driest, and disappeared through the low door, muttering. Hardly an hour went by but Lise heard those words from her mother's lips. They were the farm-wife's all-sufficient solace among the misfortunes and failures of life. She forgot them when anything turned out well.

There had been a time when Lise had occasionally answered: "But, mother, it was you that said——" "Hush, child, how can you be so headstrong! Of course your father knows, though *I* should not have sold that cow."

"She is over anxious to tell him," repeated Vrouw Driest as she returned to the farm-kitchen. Peasants always communicate a thought to a number of people in succession. "I tell her he will hear it soon enough," she added, bending over the pot which simmered on the fire. The husband, a ponderous, slow-smoking man, whose very arm, where it lay inert on the table, was heavy with depression, never even moved in reply.

"I always thought it would come to this," said the wife, bustling about the kitchen. How often had she not declared that no power on earth could drag her to the Castle? But Driest, who had earned a quiet life by playing scape-goat, could not refuse the rôle to-day, when on the point of being hunted into the wilderness.

"There's the chaise," said the wife presently, and went to the door. "He's sold the filly," she added, and turned away again. "Let them do their kissing and

nonsense alone," she thought, and cast a sad smile across at her husband's bent head.

"Thys," said the girl, at the gate, in the twilight. "It has come. Dievert told father this morning. The lease is not going to be renewed."

The young man checked his horse with a jerk, and, falling back from the shock, in the light wooden chaise, he swore aloud at Count Rexelaer.

The girl said no more, walking beside the horse, as her lover slowly guided him into the stable. He also spoke very little, unharnessing, while she helped him, and beginning to whistle meditatively as he shook out the straw. Presently she caught up a pitcher and, perhaps as an apology for her ill-tidings, went to fill it at the well. Without a word of thanks to interrupt his whistling, he took it from her, but as they crossed the courtyard together he said: "This will put off our marriage, Lise, till the Lord knows when." "Mother doesn't understand about my wanting to tell you," answered Lise, "but it didn't seem like knowing till both of us knew." He did not ask her to explain her meaning, though perhaps he hardly understood it. "Poor mother," he said, and they passed into the kitchen, where the meal lay spread beneath the dismal lamp.

"Well, Thys?" said the farmer, moving at last from his stolid despair. "I've done well," replied Thys, and, even at this moment, a note of triumph penetrated his voice. He had been away for three days, to the great Easter horse-fair at Utrecht. "There were French traders. These Frenchmen pay well." His uncle—he

called him "father"—nodded solemn approval, and said "Good." That is a great deal for a farmer.

Then they sat down to supper in silence, till the mother began: "The family are back, Thys. They arrived on the day you left."

"Did they?" said Thys. His heart was heavy, but he cut himself an enormous chunk of bread.

"Yes, and I think the old Heer might have come to see us. But no doubt your father knows."

The old man looked straight across into his foster-son's eyes. "Lise has told you," he said. Thys nodded, with his mouth full.

"It's worse for you, boy. Mother and I are old."

"Speak for yourself, father," broke in his spouse. "I hope to make butter yet for twenty years, please God."

"And where'll you make it?" said the farmer.

After that a thoughtful silence fell upon the little company, not even broken when the Baron van Rexelaer suddenly stood in their midst. They shuffled awkwardly to their feet, in a movement of general embarrassment, around the half-finished meal.

"Can you let me have a cup of coffee, Vrouw Driest?" said the Baron, with extended hand.

The woman was a sour-visaged woman, but, at this mark of condescension, her expression grew positively fierce with emotion. She had lived all her life at Deynum; the Baron, to her, was still sovereignty personified. She hurried into her parlour to get one of her grandmother's eleven Japanese cups. Alas that there should be eleven! Had not Vrouw Driest's sister-in-law, on the occasion of Lise's birth, in dusting—— There is an

old saying, by one who knew, about "renovare dolorem." The sister-in-law is still ashamed.

There was a moment's interruption of washing and wiping. "No one that we know of has ever used this cup before, Mynheer," said the farmer's wife with pardonable pride, as she placed the bit of blue china before the Baron. "You and I, Driest," began that gentleman, abruptly, "are companions in misfortune. But I want to think that yours is preventible. Can nothing be done?"

"Ah, that's what I say," remarked the wife.

"You should have said it sooner then," retorted the farmer, turning angrily upon her. "If the Count says 'Go,' landheer, go we must."

"But need he say it? Don't think I don't love you for what you've done." He held out his hand, which the slow farmer took deferentially. "There, now that's settled, I want you to do me another favour, the next best. I want you to go up to the Castle and see the Count yourself."

"Never. We need no Counts here," burst in the wife. Then she pursed up her lips and fixed her eyes on the Baron's cup. Thys had moved his long legs under the table. Lise signed to him to keep still.

"It's no use," continued the Baron. "We poor people must bend or break. I'm broken. You'd better bend."

"We did it for the best," said Driest, a little sore.

It was this very soreness the Baron dreaded. He was not a diplomatist, but he was resolved to save these poor people.

"Look here," he said. "If the Count renews,

you'll go up and thank him. Eh?" He turned to the wife.

"The Farmer knows best, landheer," replied that lady promptly. *She* was a diplomatist.

"He's a thief," said the farmer slowly. "He's no Rexelaer. D—— him."

"Father!" cried Lise.

"Ay, 'father'! What's the likes of him to come among the likes of us? As soon have some false stock of my grand-uncle's breeding—he was a wild chap and went to Town for a hair-dresser—setting up at the Chalk-house Farm as a Driest!"

Music as all this might be to the Baron's ears, he saw the danger of it. "And who knows what *will* happen at the Chalk-house Farm," he said, coming round quickly to the practical side, "when you are no longer master here?" Vrouw Driest heaved a notable sigh.

"I don't care to be," replied the farmer, doggedly, "not under the new lord. Deynum isn't Deynum with a Gueux at the Castle. The Rexelaers have gone, and they were here longer than we by a matter of many hundred years. We can go where Mynheer the Baron's gone. It isn't so far as America, I suppose. Eh, Vrouw?"

"We've come back to remain," said the Baron huskily, moved to the very bottom of his heart. "I can't live anywhere else, Driest, nor can the Baroness. Now, how about you? Don't deceive yourself, my good, faithful friend. Old clodhoppers can't breathe on any clod but their own." He waved his hand to them all, and hurried away. The farmer brought down his

enormous fist on the table with a crash that set all the dishes dancing. Thys smiled savagely. Vrouw Driest caught up her grandmother's cup, and laid it in her lap.

The Baron, slowly returning homewards, halted for a moment upon the little village-green. At this hour the place was quite deserted, but in the darkness you could trace the shapes of the Church and School, and other few buildings scattered around. That light yonder was Job Henniks'! There the cronies of the village were doubtless assembled, discussing the old lord and the new.

"Mynheer van Rexelaer, might I speak to you for a moment?" said a polite voice, which he did not recognise, at his side. He turned. "They told me at the priest's you would be coming this way. I am John Borck. It is, unfortunately, many years since we met."

"It is," said the Baron stiffly, to his wife's old antagonist. They walked along the road, side by side, the Baron painfully expectant.

"The matter is purely one of business," began the Lord of Rollingen, stammering out the central thought of his previously prepared speeches, "and it is always best, I think, to transact business personally. I—I—if I understand rightly, there are some objects from the Castle you wish to do away with. If I am mistaken, I beg pardon."

"I have decided nothing as yet," said Baron Rexelaer, not in a pleasant tone of voice.

"Still supposing you should resolve to—I understood from Cécile Borck, who is staying—look here, Rexelaer, we used to know each other well enough

once. I don't want to do you a favour. Not I; I want you to do me one. You know I'm a great man for antiquities and family-histories"—Baron Rexelaer knew nothing of the kind—"now what's the use of selling portraits, for instance, to brokers? The Rexelaers and the Borcks have been closely connected in the centuries when nobody differed about religion, and a lot of your belongings must be of especial value to us. Now, why shouldn't you sell them to me, as I want them? If you like, we could easily make out an agreement, that, in the next twenty years, you or your daughter could take them back—at the same price. I think that would be fair. Or the same price and four per cent. interest. Yes, that would be fairer." This last inspiration came to John Borck in the moment of speaking and hugely delighted him.

"It can't be, Borck," said the Baron, in an unsteady voice, now. "For one thing, my wife wouldn't like it."

"Nor would mine," rose to honest John Borck's lips, but he checked the words. "It is merely a business transaction," he repeated.

"Nevertheless, I am most deeply grateful for your generous offer"—Baron Borck would have interrupted—"No, no, do not think I cannot comprehend. Your kindness even emboldens me, while refusing one service, to ask for another. Will you let me?"

"What is it?" queried cautious John Borck.

"There is a man here, one of my old farmers, who cannot get on under the new régime. He is a good man; the question is a—*a personal one*, regarding myself. It is Driest, of the Chalk-house, which you have

long wanted to buy. If you had a farm for him, on the other side of Rollingen, I—I should look upon it as a great kindness to myself.”

“I shall bear it in mind,” said Borck. They had reached the Parsonage. “Permit me one question in parting,” continued the lord of Rollingen. “If you sell these things to strangers, how will you prevent Count Rexelaer’s ultimately acquiring them?”

And now it will seem incredible to those who live in Koopstad and are wide-awake that this sleepy, single-thoughted country-gentleman had never even caught a glimpse of his danger.

“Remember what happened about the Castle. That was a dirty trick, I thought. I know a good deal about the Rexelaers, more than you think. I was in no hurry to call on the people. But my cousin, you remember, married the brother.”

“There is a good deal to know,” said the Baron.

“Perhaps I know it. I know about the ‘k’ in their name, for instance. Ah, you didn’t expect that, did you? I told you I was a bit of an antiquary. Now, to a great many people, that ‘k’ wouldn’t matter a brass cent; it does to you and me, because we are old fogies. The old fogies ought to stick together in this brand-new day. You can take time to consider my proposal. I am in no hurry. Good night.”

“Good night and God bless you, John Borck,” said the Baron van Rexelaer, Here was a kind word from one of his own class at last.

The Lord of Rollingen was one of the richest and most powerful nobles in the country. He was a strange quiet man, of strong idiosyncrasy, who allowed his wife

to do whatever she chose, except on the rare occasions when he did not want her to do it. When his young cousin Cécile, who scarcely knew her mighty kinsman, had penetrated into his room that morning with much fear and trembling, he had first been taken by surprise, then interested, then greatly pleased. He was an aristocrat down to the bottom, and therefore a just man as well as a proud. It is only your nine-tenths aristocrat who is prejudiced beyond the limits of justice.

"You are right, Cécile," had said Baron John Borck.

CHAPTER IX.

OF SOME THAT RETURNED TO DEYNUM AND SOME THAT
DEPARTED THENCE.

As spring went slowly deepening into summer—the process takes a long time in our Northern region!—the Countess Margherita's heart began to soften a little towards Deynum. It was by no means a cold heart; it was a warm heart benumbed. From her new conservatory—the excrescence—she would sadly watch the sun in his daily struggles to climb higher behind the gaunt rampart of distant trees, and when suddenly, one pale morning, the grim wall stood coloured over with a faint shimmer of silver-green promise, she screamed aloud to Laïssa, and went dancing away among her plants, like a butterfly, with all the parrots yelling and all the dogs wildly capering around her. Count Hilarius, who seldom took any notice of her “extravagances,” looked in at the door. “What now?” he inquired, as she whirled past him, holding the furiously barking Florizel triumphantly aloft. “It is spring!” she cried back at him. “Summer is coming, *your* summer, the pale one, the second-best! Houp-là, Amarinda, ma belle!” “Oh Printemps, ô mon roi, que j'adore! Oh Printemps qui—qui—qui—ô Flore! Go away, Ilario; I cannot compose while you are by!” Count Hilarius most willingly went away.

"Laïssa," said the Countess, stopping out of breath, "I have often thought during the last long months that purgatory must be like this, all black. If only it gets a little greener,—a little greener!"

"You did not like it any better when it was white," replied Laïssa.

"And you then?" cried Margherita impatiently.

"Ah, M'am Rita,"—the mulatto shivered—"You speak of purgatory; it is hell. Paradise is flaming-hot. Hell is, like Holland, *cold*."

At the Hague things had been different. In a city the seasons do not change; only the temperature changes. And the Countess Rexelaer's temperature had been regulated by the heating-apparatus.

The great event of the season had been the return of the old family. It was reported in the village that Count Rexelaer, when told, had grown white with rage, and had sworn by high and low that such a thing should never be. Yet he could not prevent it, albeit all Deynum was his. In bygone days Father Bulbius had obtained from the Baron a life-long lease, at a nominal rent, of the house he still occupied, with the right to under-let. The Father now immediately availed himself of this privilege, and the Baroness reaped the reward of her early bounties to the Church. The old man appeared before Veronica one Sunday morning, after mass, in the full pomp of his sacerdotal robes. "We are going to occupy the house by the Church," he said. "The long walk is too much for me." Veronica bent her head, with a snort.

When Dievert brought the Count the few florins of the house-rent, that great personage screamed out that it was a conspiracy and he would have the law of the lot. But he left his new tenants in peace, nevertheless; his sister-in-law had dropped him a hint.

He scowled fiercely, with averted face, the first time he met the Baroness and Wendela in the village. But Margherita, venturing out in a close-carriage, passed an old-fashioned gentleman who made her an old-fashioned bow. She was charmed by his manner and said so at dinner, and regretted that circumstances prevented their knowing their cousins. "What do you think, chevalier?" "Madame," responded the gallant de Souza, "I never disagree with your excellent judgment," and Count Rexelaer understood that his son's tutor had just given him a lesson in manners.

The various grandees of the neighbourhood hastened to call at the quondam Parsonage, and showed themselves anxious to imply all permissible admiration of the comfort the Baroness had conjured up around her. It was impossible for a room to look poor which the Baroness van Rexelaer inhabited, and everyone declared that the Villa—"Villa," if you like, but the Baroness preferred "Farmhouse"—was really a delightful old place. And indeed it was; numberless souvenirs and personal treasures lay scattered over the half-furnished rooms, and Gustave looked after these relics of the past, Gustave, who had returned to the family from an enforced retirement, during their Pension-life, in the house of a sister, whose many shiftless children had worried his neat mind into despair. Such of the heir-looms as still possessed any market value had been

sold; the rest Mynheer van Rexelaer had ultimately ceded to Baron Borck. The latter gentleman would have brought his recalcitrant wife to visit the Baroness but that he dreaded to patronize in misfortune. Everyone else came, however, except the rich Amsterdam bankers, who forgot.

There was money enough now for simple wants, and freedom from anxiety. The family subsisted on the annual payment from "the Lady's Dole," and a remnant of the Baroness's little fortune. Wendela resumed her lessons with the village-schoolmaster. They could not make out whether she was glad to be back or not. "I like the lessons," she said.

Baron Borck intimated to Mynheer van Rexelaer that the Count "would have no objection" to the family's occasionally walking in the park. He had asked him. Baron Borck was a very influential man. Mynheer van Rexelaer received the intimation with thanks, but did not avail himself of the permission. He walked out among the villagers, who stood aloof, deferential, but awkward; his sole pleasures were a game with the Father or a chat at the Chalkhouse Farm.

For the Priests were still at the Chalkhouse Farm, and likely to remain there. It had happened on this wise. One evening Thys had returned home from the village with the news that there were to be flags and fireworks next week on the occasion of Count Rexelaer's birthday, and a state-visit of congratulation from the Commune.

"We shall soon be quit of all that," said the Farmer roughly. "I'm well-nigh through with Baron Borck's steward."

Thys went and drew off his heavy boots in the passage. Then, returning to the great blue-tiled fire-place which takes up one whole side of the kitchen, he stationed himself behind his foster-father's chair. "Well, I'll say it," he began aloud, "I've talked it over with Lise, and she says I'd better. Look here, father, now the Baron's back in Deynum, how about Joost Hakkert and Job Henniks and the rest?"

"What are you driving at?" replied old Driest. "Speak out, Thys. And come round from behind my chair."

But this latter command Thys—the great, long lout—preferred to ignore. "He'll be lonely here, will the Baron," said Thys boldly, "and he'll want someone to speak up for him, now. Father, I'm thinking: as the Baron's come back, it won't do for us to run away."

"You should have thought that six months sooner, then," cried the exasperated farmer, bounding in his ample arm-chair. "Get to your work, Thys, and leave thinking to clearer heads than yours."

The young fellow was slinking away obediently, but his uncle still called after him: "And you say that Lise's thoughts are as wise as yours?"

"Lise fancied I might be right, Father."

"'Fancied.' Is that the way you young ones love each other? Hey, there she is—the hussy!"—for Lise appeared in the doorway, bearing a steaming tub—"and how about your mother? Does she also 'fancy you might be right'?"

"Oh, mother knows *you are*, father," said the girl demurely, and she added, when her lover had left the room: "So you see we are all four agreed."

Thus it came about that Farmer Driest went up to the Castle and had an interview with the Count. He came back and said he would rather not speak of the Count, nor of the interview. He did not understand the new Squire, he said. Being only a farmer, he could not know that even a great noble has sometimes, in little things, to do as his neighbours want him to. "You have behaved most disgracefully," Count Rexelaer had said. "You can stay on at the farm. Good-day."

"They are winning their way to the widest popularity," Mevrouw Rexelaer-Borck informed her mother. "Mina Borck says so, and she is the best person to know. Hilarius pays for a Protestant parson, who is to be inducted next autumn, though I fear he is somewhat lukewarm in the face of papistical presumption. As for poor Margherita, with her painful antecedents, dear Mina lends her excellent books, but I warn her it will prove not the slightest use."

"Mina Borck is a fool, and so you may tell her," replied the irascible Dowager.—"I!" thought Mevrouw Elizabeth.—"If Hilarius intends to stand for the States Provincial in the Conservative interest, he cannot afford to make trouble with the Catholics."

"But, Mamma, ought that thought to deter him?"

The old Baroness grinned at her daughter with a full display of her pearly teeth.

"Especially, Mamma, as the Liberal Majority is overwhelming, in any case. John Borck sees to that."

"Majority or not, Rexelaer has his way to make at Court, and he must avoid all complications. He is a

very clever man; 'I admire him exceedingly, in spite of his nervous ways. I should not wonder if he died an 'Excellency.' He is worth two of your husband, Eliza, as far as brains go."

"He cannot hold a candle to my husband!" cried Mevrouw Elizabeth indignantly, forgetting, for a moment, her awe of the hooked nose and chin, "neither in looks, nor in temper, nor in manners, nor in anything! His brains are just merely his wife's money that was scraped together out yonder, selling——"

"Well, I only said he had enough," interrupted the Dowager impatiently. "And how about the police-summons? Is that little difficulty not yet out of the world?"

"No, indeed. Simmans purposely keeps the thing going. I am certain he does it on purpose. He has been down there three several times, to examine her, as he says. It is absurd."

"Is that your word?" said the fierce old Dowager. "I should have selected another."

It was quite true that Simmans, the young functionary with the sleepy stare, had been very often to Deynum. He lounged about the Castle and grounds, and sometimes was momentarily amiable to Jane, if she happened to be staying in the house. That young lady ignored him or, suddenly awakening to his presence, endeavoured to make him conversationally ridiculous. With poor success, for he had a habit of lazily falling on his feet.

Mevrouw Rexelaer-Borck was much pained by her daughter's behaviour, more by the young man's, and

most by her sister-in-law's. On no account would she have brought Simmans to the house, could she have guessed that he sang nigger songs to the banjo. In her respectable drawing-room he had never even hinted at this unpleasing accomplishment.

She quarrelled with Margherita about more things than these musical performances which formed the delight of the whole menagerie, with the exception of the howling dogs. She had quietly arranged, for instance, to have the idolatrous emblems removed from the closed chapel. Suddenly the Countess intervened—"with disgraceful vehemence," Elizabeth afterwards complained to her husband—"and language! You would have said a Scheveningen fishwife!" "They are *my* ancestors," cried Margherita, who had really taught herself to believe this, and she stamped her foot. "And it is my religion!" "Pooh," replied the indignant daughter of the Borcks. "Your ancestors and your religion! They are both equally genuine. I would not give two-pence for either, or both!" After that, she departed from the Castle, which was a pity, for she took Jane with her, and Jane's hesitating lover ungallantly remained behind. He explained that he must "complete his inquiry."

And this is how he completed it. With a rapidity which astounded him.

"Ah, pooty Miss Jemima, why-y-y
You make dis han'some niggah cry-y-y?"

—"chorus, Laïssa, chorus!" Margherita clapped her hands. Laïssa and the parrots shrieked undistinguish-

able sounds. Florizel, seated at his mistress's feet, protested dismally, with uplifted head, in spite of slaps. The singing-birds all sang their loudest, increasing, as the hubbub rose higher, in their efforts to overpower it. Margherita laughed and shouted for glee.

"'You'll be sorry nuf, when han'some niggah die!'"

Simmans stopped, out of breath, and laid aside his instrument. "I like it," began Margherita presently, and her voice had entirely changed its tone. "Almost, if one closes one's eyes, it were possible to imagine oneself out in the soft warm moonlight, away yonder, beneath the verandah. Of course the words are very different, but the sing-song is just the same. Laïssa does the crooning far better than you, Monsieur Simmans; still, you do it quite well enough for a poor ignorant European." Laïssa grinned. "The gentleman's songs are good, are they not, Laïssa?"

"Ours are better," said the waiting-woman mechanically.

"You are rude. I feel thirsty with laughing. Go, get me something to drink. Something cool, and very sweet, and that quenches one's thirst." The mulatto slipped away.

"Oh the loveliness of that moonlight!" began Margherita, left alone with her "judge," as she was pleased to call him. "You Northerners have no idea of 'living.' It is not worth one's while to *be*."

"I can see loveliness," he replied, fingering his banjo, "everywhere. It is a thing of environment. Never, before I came here, had I an idea how lovely this country can be."

"Indeed?" she said. "Deynum? But you must have a most extraordinary taste."

"The dead earth," he continued, "is not beautiful till the sun rises upon it. I have seen the sun rise on Deynum, Comtesse."

"At this time of the year? Do you expect me to believe that? Since when do young gentlemen from the Hague get up to enjoy a November sunrise?"

True, it was November. How long was this kind of thing to continue? Was she only a beautiful clod, or as sly as she was beautiful? No matter; this long-drawn sentimentalism led nowhere.

"I'm so sorry about the annoyance you have endured," he said briskly, "but, of course, the affair will be hushed up. I hear it has created much ill-feeling at the Palace. Your husband's official position, you know. Never mind; I have the whole thing in my hands, and you shall not hear of it again."

"At last?" said Margherita, "and when, Monsieur, will you take that final step?"

"Immediately." He struck a few notes on his banjo. "Shall I sing to you again?" he said.

"Yes, do. It is rather fun. Rollo, Jocko, attention, mes amis! We are going to begin!"

"Ah, but what I sing is for you alone!"

"I could not possibly be so selfish. Flora enjoys it too much."

"You will not be offended?"

"No. Why?"

And with an expression of tenderest feeling pouring from his half-shut eyes he sang in a rollicking, joking, devil-may-care voice:

“Oh, pootiest M'am Rita, why-y-y
You make dis wretched niggah cry-y-y?
Will you nevah hear him sigh-igh-igh?”

The countenance of the lady on the sofa suddenly clouded over. She flung herself forward, with a flash like a snake's, and struck the instrument, in the vehemence of her lithe brown arm, out of the singer's hands, across the brick floor of the conservatory.

“Encore une contravention!” she said, and looked him fiercely in the face. “Dressez procès-verbal, Monsieur le Substitut.” And then, as Laïssa entered with a tray, “Tell the Jonker Reinout, Laïssa, that I should like to look at his sketches, now.”

That evening the family at the Castle sat down to dinner alone.

A fortnight later “the Countess R——, wife of an Officer connected with the Royal Household” was sentenced to a fine in one of the petty courts. And shortly before Christmas the engagement was announced of the Freule Jane van Rexelaer with Simmans, “the son of Simmans, the Secretary-General, you know.” Presently the young lady received a parcel from her kind aunt at Deynum, containing a guitar-player, one of those beautiful “étrennes” which overflow the Paris confectioners' windows at that season of the year. The doll's head was empty, but the next post brought a box of the perishable sweets called “fondants.”

“Insert them from the outside, my dear Jane,”

wrote the Countess, "in this mannikin I send you from Deynum."

"Is there a joke?" asked Mevrouw Elizabeth, who, at that moment, forgave even Margherita.

"No indeed," replied Jane gravely.

"The 'Fondants' are delicious," said sweet-toothed Rolline.

CHAPTER X.

"COUSINS."

So summer faded into winter, and winter blossomed into summer at Deynum, and "the Family" went away to the Hague before Christmas and did not return till quite late in the spring. Count Hilarius was now an important personage in Court circles. Everybody liked him; he was so obliging and unpretending, and he had plenty of money. "And that magnificent place in the country, you know, which had fallen into the hands of the younger branch of the family, till it came back to the Count through his wife. An extraordinary story. Yes, he is a very great man, is van Rexelaer van Deynum."

Margherita went to several balls and looked splendid in her diamonds. She began to like society, pleased with her success, once she had picked herself off the sofa and admired her figure in the glass. "I shall be ugly soon enough," she said. People declared that she had "du chic," and stopped to stare with sudden interest at the heiress of the house of "La Jolais-Farjolle—one of the greatest families in Europe. You can see it by the way she carries her head." Nothing is more amazing than the ignorance, in these matters, of "the few who know."

And the Countess even gave a couple of great receptions, one towards the end of the season, a second-best one, in honour of the marriage of the Freule Jane. "Rolline must do better," Count Hilarius remarked pointedly to his sister-in-law. When she repeated the words—two hours later—to her husband, "He is mad with ambition," said the tranquil judge.

A week or two after the house at Deynum had been definitely shut up, the Baron one morning stole timidly into the park. This day he did not get farther than the sight of the shuttered windows. Twenty-four hours later he was trying to pat one of the deer. It was a mistake. His wiser daughter curtly refused to accompany him.

And their life flowed on smoothly, monotonously, not unhappily withal. The Baroness went among her poor more diligently than ever; the Baron potted about in the village, surrounded by a halo of pitiful respect. He was too gentle-natured to resent the pity. And of evenings Father Bulbius would drop in for his game and a glass of "King's Wine."

"The Count has not got *this*," said Mynheer van Rexelaer, tapping his glass. "Hush, mon ami," interposed the Baroness with a smile. "You are right, my dear," said the Baron.

Wendela alone found no strength in her heart for reconciliation with life. Perhaps because to her that loss was an anticipation which for her parents was only a regret. She had resolved, from the first, to remain pitiless to her own sorrow, and they who have the mettle to make such a resolution seldom lack the grip to maintain it. Between her parents and herself it

had built up a barrier which she hated and resented without the power, or the wish, to remove it. She lived an emotional existence, not outside but inside her even life with them, in an inner chamber of which her firm hand kept the key. Silent almost to moroseness, she would occasionally break out into demonstrative affection towards her mother, but always with a perceptible jerk, as if recalling how much she loved her. To her father she was dutiful and reserved, with a conscious check on her thoughts of him. For she felt herself, unadmittedly, to possess one of those strong-willed yet impulsive characters which are habitually rendered wretched by the consciousness of having spoken—and thought—not at all, or too much. A faithful, truthful woman's nature, strong-hearted and clear-brained, one of those women the superficial write down "disagreeable," because of their straight lips and solemn eyes.

Considering all things, she was receiving a fair education, from the schoolmaster and her mother combined, an education which would prove absolutely useless in these days of diplomas and examinations, but of such things the Baroness knew nothing, excepting that they were a sin against Genesis iii.

One evening Wendela looking up from "Ta douleur, Duperrier," which she was committing to memory, abruptly apostrophized her father, in his arm-chair by the fire. "Papa, when I am grown-up, shall I be obliged to earn my own living?" "No, Wendela; girls like you cannot earn their own living. What makes you ask?" "I wanted to know," replied Wendela. The Baron smiled contentedly in the shade. Wendela, on her

parents' death, would be entitled to the entire capital of "The Lady's Dole." For, then, at any rate, Strum must rest convinced that there would never again be a Baroness Rexelaer.

If the girl had a pleasure, it was her hidden dream-life, to which she clung, even while conscious of having long outgrown it. She still loved to weave brave fancies around her Pilgrim Knight, not pretty little fairy idylls, but strong, bright tales of chivalry; wrong redressed and innocence upheld. Life was dark and thunder-threatened,—devil-haunted, as her mother said; through it rode her Hero of the Closed Visor, in a trail of light.

"There is a boy," she said once to her mother, breaking one of the long periods of silence, so common between them.

"What do you mean, child?"

"At the Castle. There is a boy?"

"Yes, certainly; you know there is."

"I hate him."

"Wendela, you are now fifteen. You are too old for such childish sayings."

Wendela bit her lips.

There was no reason for anyone to hate Reinout. Certainly the reason could never be envy. He was now sixteen, and the least enviable of youths.

When first the boredom of Monsieur de Souza's stories settled heavy on his powdered and periwigged young head, Reinout had turned right and left, as has been shown, in vain hope of escape. The dry books of the Deynum library disgusted him; if he dashed away into the wide liberty of the woods and fields, he

saw a scornful smile go wreathing his father's bloodless lips. And as he grew in years, he understood more clearly that his bringing-up was not like that of other boys. Old people thought him charming—a dangerous sign. He told the Countess de Bercy at dinner a long story about the late Empress of Russia's strange passion for bananas which were brought over direct from the West Indies and, "after her death no one ever rescinded the order, and recently the Emperor came on a cellar piled up with baskets of rotting fruit." He kissed the Countess's hand as he bowed her from her chair, and he caught the scowl of disgust at his "confounded priggishness" in her student-nephew Ivo's eyes.

"Papa," said Reinout next morning to his father, "I should like to learn about everything, like other boys."

"You can have masters, when we get back to the Hague, as you had last winter, René," replied the Count. "What is it you want particularly to learn?"

"All about everything," burst out Reinout, and then he felt what a stupid answer that was for a lad of his age. "I mean," he added hastily, "I want to know why things are like this and what is going to change them. And about right and wrong, and suffering, and the end of it all."

"You will attend a confirmation class in a year or two," said Count Rexelaer coldly. "As for the rest, you are rather vague. If you mean political economy, you will have enough of that for your diplomatic examination. You will find it is all empty talk." And Count Rexelaer walked out of the room, leaving his son considerably nonplussed.

In sheer despair Reinout precipitately leaped into independent thought at an age when most boys still allow their teachers to think for them. He became a source of constant vexation to M. de Souza. "Why," he said one morning to that estimable "Court Circular," "do the villagers live in little houses and we in a Castle?"

"You know very well that such is God's Ordinance," replied the Chevalier impatiently.

"But all men are equal," persisted Reinout mischievously. "And there seems to be no reason why all men should not be gentlemen, too."

"All men are not equal, and you know it. That was a lie of the French revolution. But if you mean that money has nothing to do with being a gentleman, you are right."

"I like the French revolution," retorted René, knowing nothing about it. "I wish it had succeeded."

After this, Monsieur de Souza felt that his mission was ended. He continued to live with the family, but, shortly before Reinout's sixteenth birthday, the boy received another tutor, a very clever scholar although not a cultured one. Reinout preferred Monsieur de Souza, with his old-world ideas of honour, yet he could not complain, having asked for the change. Besides, he now studied the Dutch Constitutional System and Political Economy, and International Law and a number of other sciences, useful and ornamental.

Count Rexelaer warmly thanked the Chevalier for the complete success of his plan. Undoubtedly it had worked well in many ways. Informed in a pleasantly cynical manner, of the littleness of all the world's great-

nesses and the insipidity of its pleasures, Reinout never even experienced that delightful curiosity of naughtiness which leads so many boys astray. He did not want to lift a veil which had already been lifted for him with a neat arrangement of draperies. He had "seen the world." That is, he had been shown, as in a peep-show, one little corner of it, tastefully laid out in flower-beds, an Eden, whose Adams and Eves have long ago lost all that made a Paradise, except, perhaps, their naked shamelessness.

He did not like the city, at least not that stuccoed part of it in which he lived. He was eager to get back to Deynum and glad of the Count's permission to start a day or two before the others, with his tutor. "And see the fires are lighted," said Margherita, "I feel sure we ought to have waited till June."

Reinout, immediately on arriving, went out into the full beauty of the May afternoon. The place looked glorious, he thought, so fresh and green and quiet. He drew a deep breath of healthful air, air strong with the awakening of springtide, amid the rustle of the mighty oaks. "Oh, delicious," he said.

The great park lay peaceful around him, in its own majestic loneliness. Here and there the sober deer moved vaguely behind the trees. A dragon-fly went sailing past, and suddenly Reinout felt how spacious God is. Only Man is cramped.

Presently the chapel came in sight, in its tangle of sheltering ferns. He smiled as he remembered a recent difference of opinion between his mother and aunt Eliza-

beth. Mevrouw Rexelaer-Borck had suggested utilizing the little spire as a dove-cot; Margherita had objected, strenuously, and there had been a scene.

Reinout stepped off the path and went round by the chancel, where a sight met him for which he was certainly not prepared. High up, on the broad ledge outside one of the arched windows, a tall girl was perched, her feet hanging down ungracefully, her face pressed against the glass. Of course he recognised her at once, though he had never seen her before but from a distance. And she, hearing the soft swish of his approaching steps, turned round hastily, in a whirlwind of long, dark hair, lost her balance, gave a cry of impatience, and came down with a rush. He ran forward and caught her.

"Not hurt, I hope?" he said, steadying himself, and her, under the shock.

"You needn't have stopped me, thank you," she answered roughly, and stood panting, not only from the fall. "I was coming down," she said.

The twinkle which came into his eyes said plainly: "Is that your usual way of doing it?" But that kind of courageous fib was not one which Reinout, "*splendide mendax*," would take exception at.

If Wendela had a good quality, however, it was straightforwardness. "Of course I lost my hold," she added hastily. "But that was your fault." She felt furious with him for having caught her dangling there.

"I am so sorry," he said meekly. "I hadn't an idea. Nobody ever comes near this place, you know."

"They used to come," she answered quickly. "And *that* didn't use to be there then." She pointed to an

ugly stain of orange damp. "But they were our people," she added. "It is different."

"They are my people too," said the youth, smiling. "I am Reinout van Rexelaer."

She flushed. "They are not everybody's people," she replied recklessly. She felt very high and mighty, though conscious of discovering the very weaknesses she would fain have hid. Being fifteen, and a woman, she was tremulously scornful of male children of seventeen. "I suppose I must apologise for intruding," she said magnificently, and gathered her scant skirts about her and departed.

Reinout asked his father, as soon as that gentleman arrived, to have the chapel cleaned.

"Why not?" said the Count, who always said "Why not?" when careless what he said.

A month or two later the young fellow met his ungracious "cousin" again. He was riding down a quiet lane in the full white flame of a July noon. The dusty trees and half-hid wayside-flowers slept, still but dreamy, beneath the blazing splendours of the sky. Reinout's horse heaved its moist and fragrant flanks to the creak of the saddle, in all the deliciously strong reserve of a walking-pace. Reinout himself was moodily thinking of nothing, and he came upon Wendela where she dozed against a hawthorn-hedge, a book and a basket of wild roses in her lap.

She stopped him with a gesture, as he took off his cap. She had been dreaming of her dear "Knight Pilgrim," and she looked up,—out of the dulness of her daily life, at this courtly cavalier with the checked knickerbockers and olive cheeks. "Thank you," she

said, "about the Chapel." She blushed, and suddenly he saw that she was charming.

"Oh, my father ordered that to be done," he answered lightly.

"No, it was you," insisted Wendela. "When Papa came home and told Mamma, I knew it was you." She hesitated. "I want you to do me one more favour. You couldn't let me into the Chapel, I suppose, just once?" His answer did not follow immediately, and, as the seconds slowly fell upon her waiting heart, she turned and fled. In a moment he had caught her up. "Freule, Freule," he cried piteously, "you are losing all your flowers!" She stood still, gasping, in the broiling July sun. "Of course you can go to the Chapel," he added. "I will ask my father for the key."

"Pooh!" she said, so vigorously that his horse shied. She lifted her firm eyes to his, and suddenly he saw that she was also beautiful. "Nobody must know that I asked you," she continued. "I want to go in the dead of night. Just once."

"Nonsense. And the watchman?"

"I knew the watchman's hours, before ever you had heard of him," she retorted. "Do you think *I* am afraid of the night in Deynum?"

"Freule," he made answer in "a still, small voice," "I shall be outside the Chapel to-night, at twelve o'clock, with the key. At the risk of my life I shall abstract it from my father's desk! Till then the Holy Saints have you in their keeping; fair maiden, Good day."

She thought he was laughing at her religion, but what can you expect of a Gueux? With nervous hand

she drew a little book from under her tumbled flowers. "Take this," she said. "Don't tell anybody I had it. The schoolmaster gave it me a year ago."

"But why should I take it?"

"Because it's the dearest thing I have. There!" And, dropping the book on his knee, she left him. This time he did not follow her.

"Rather a disagreeable child," he thought, as he sat looking after her retreating figure, twisted in the saddle, her book in his careless hand.

Said she to herself on her way homeward: "We are quits. "I've paid him, for what I wanted most, with the dearest thing I had. I hate him. And, as Papa says, pay your enemy, however you may treat your friend. Mamma doesn't know; she hates nobody. As if it were right to love thieves."

CHAPTER XI.

THE DAWN OF THE HIGHER LIFE.

REINOUT, walking his horse in the blazing sunshine, peeped curiously into the cheaply-bound little volume which was her "dearest thing on earth."

"Verses!" he said with ready scorn. "All women are alike."

He knew enough about verses. Sometimes he read the books his mother brought him and sometimes he praised them unread. "Always say 'yes' to a woman," the Chevalier was wont to remark, "if you feel it would hurt her to hear you say: No."

"O mon âme.

"O ma flamme.

"O que je t'aime.

That is poetry.

"Toujours du même."

"None of my talent has descended to my child," sighed Margherita. "And yet I feel sure he will be some sort of a genius. Perhaps a Prime Minister." "A what?" asked the Count, and walked away to dissemble his laughter. He rejoiced, however, to think that his wife had come round to his view, whatever her road.

"Well, she begins young with her love-ditties,"

thought Reinout, but, nevertheless, on his return, he settled himself in a window-seat with the book. It was a Belgian edition of Victor Hugo's "Les Voix Intérieures."

He glanced at the first page. The opening words struck him.

"This Age is great and strong . . ."

The quietly impressive words, so unlike much of Victor Hugo's later redundancy, sank slowly into his soul. Here was a gospel of the time, which met him half-way on his hap-hazard path. "Are you looking for me?" it said. "I am here."

When he had finished, he turned back and began again. He had never read other poetry before than love-songs and bouts-rimés.

And then he plunged headlong into the piece which follows, that magnificent poem on the death of the exiled Charles X. Here the novice soon floundered out of his depth, but he still held on, borne irresistibly forward by the rush of the rhythm, as all must understand who appreciate the sublimest of spouters. It is impossible to stop; the very bewilderment of the reader twists him helplessly onwards amid those whirlpools of eloquence. And in all the Titan's endless volumes Reinout could not have lighted on a poem more calculated to impress him than this one. Aristocrat as he must ever remain in all the prejudices of his bringing-up, lover as he had been destined to become, from childhood, of that lowly human greatness which your mere aristocrat ignores, this song of tenderest reconciliation struck chords within his being of whose exist-

ence his incompleteness had never been aware. And when he reached, with palpitating heart and eager breath, the great finale:

“Oh Poesy, to heaven on frightened wing thou fliest!”

he started to his feet, and stood staring before him, into a new gulf yawning ahead—or was it a visionary ladder, whose top is hid in Heaven? A world of illusion, Idea—the soul-world of beautiful hopes and fancies—the world in which all men are brothers, great and strong and greatly worthy—a world at which the cynic laughs, with tears for laughter—; at last he beheld it; uplifted on the pinions of his ignorance, into cloudland,—and beyond that,—to the sun! He will never forget that moment, although to this day, he cannot tell you, in intelligible prose, what took place in his soul. O the sweetness of it! The sadness of it! The beautiful, sorrowful hope! He did not know what he was saying, as he stumbled on through a wilderness of magnificent words. But gradually a single thought stood out clear among all this confusion of greatness, the majesty—not of your highnesses and excellencies and eminences—but of the naked Soul of man. He had been yearning for it, searching for it, unwittingly; at last he could grasp it, and read the riddle of life.

All that afternoon he hurried upwards, a breathless explorer on Alpine heights. Like an Indian Prince from his father's palace, he had escaped out of the gilded cage where the neat canaries warbled, away into the regions of the angels' song, “Peace on earth, goodwill among men. Hallelujah!” His soul was drunken with poesy. He tore off the kid glove from his heart.

He was utterly unreasonable and nonsensical, full of clap-trap and tall-talk and foolishness. Yes, thank God; he was all that at last.

"What is it? What is the matter, René?" asked the Countess at dinner. "Oh nothing." Of course. She wearied of asking him. But she found him in the library, late that evening, poring over a large volume, half a dozen others scattered around. He looked up impatiently, as she came closer, and tenderly laid her hand on his shoulder. "What have you got there?" she asked. "Ah, that is right. He is pretty; is he not?"

"Oh yes," he replied savagely, but he went and opened the door very courteously for her and touched her brow with his lips. Then he returned to his Prophet, his Priest of the Most High!

A couple of hours later he was standing, in the soft summer darkness, before the empty altar of the hushed little chapel, by Wendela's side.

"It is desecrated," said the girl in a low voice. "You have desecrated it. I am glad to have seen it once more. From the window up there I could just reach the tip of the Pilgrim's helmet. Do you know which is the Pilgrim? No, poor boy, you know nothing. I will show you."

The chapel was very softly lighted by the radiance of the moon-filled night; busts and tablets stood out gently in a glamour of silvered gloom.

Mechanically Reinout followed the daughter of the real Rexelaers as she led him from monument to monument, telling in an awe-struck whisper, stories of

the men and women whose passion-laden existences had sunk to rest beneath these effigies and urns. "Perhaps they are listening now," she said, "to hear if I tell you right?" The heavy night-air breathed warm about the pair. A little rustle awoke in the aisle. She caught hold of his arm.

"Isn't it a strange thought," whispered Reinout, "that all the lives of these dead men and women are concentrated, as it were, in you and me? You and me, come to visit them together in the dead of night."

"Papa says——," she began, and then she turned passionately upon him: "These are mine," she said, "mine only. Do you understand, you—Reinout Rexelaer? All the rest was mine once too, and these are still."

"But, Freule——" he stammered.

"Oh don't pity me; I won't have your pity. I am proud of our shame. Some day, perhaps, my dead, who are not really dead, might recover me the rights of which your father robbed us. And then what would be left to you?"

"Only myself," he replied, with a sorry, half-amused smile.

This answer impressed her, but she fought against the sensation. "And what is yourself?" she asked, her delicate little nose high in air. "With us it is different. Rich or beggared, high or humble, as Papa says, what need we care? For, ours is the greater glory, even in disgrace."

"I envy you that conviction," he answered thoughtfully, and with no suspicion of a sneer.

She held out her hand on the Chapel-steps.

"Good-bye, Knight Pilgrim."

CHAPTER XII.

THE DAWN PROVES CLOUDY.

"WELL, I shall say it," declared Veronica. "Why not?"

"What?" asked the Father.

"Does your Reverence not know? Then I shall keep my own counsel. But *my* opinion is: why should anyone be afraid of their betters? If really our betters, the less reason to be afraid. And if not——" Veronica whisked a dish off the table and herself from the room.

Father Bulbius bent over the tattered volume on his knees, leisurely filling his pipe with the finest of Turkish tobaccos. He was no longer the happy possessor of an untidy snugger; the new house contained but two rooms on the ground-floor, and Veronica had refused to abandon the "parlour." Occasionally the latter uncomfortable apartment would be honoured with a state-visit from the Chevalier de Souza, who was both a freethinker at heart and a Catholic in etiquette, and confessed and communicated at Easter. Other intercourse with the Castle there was none. The brief enjoyment of Reinout's friendship had ended in a ceremonious salute.

Veronica, on her part, had no proper appreciation of ceremony. Having made up her mind to bestow a

piece of it on the gentlefolks, she called out one day from the door of "our hovel," as she chose to designate the Parsonage: "Hey, Mynheer! You are the Jonker from the Castle?"

"Of course I am," replied the young man, standing still.

"I know you are. There's something I want to say to you, Jonker. I've no more reason to love the Baron's family than you have. They've turned us out of our house as you've turned them out of theirs, and without paying, which is worse. But when it comes to keeping a woman away from the place she is used to pray in, twice a day for years, and all her ancestors lying round awaiting her, I say that it's a cruel thing. And I'd say the same to the Count your father, if I thought he'd listen to the likes of me. But I think he looks prouder than you, in spite of your haughty face that God gave you to go and be a Count with, as Counts there must be in this world below, though not in the hereafter." And she retreated into the house, leaving Reinout very much troubled in mind.

He did not willingly ask favours of a father who never conceded anything unless it was not a favour; after consultation with the Chevalier, he broached the subject to Margherita. To his surprise the Countess immediately sat up, said: "Quite right. I understand," and went in to her husband, but that gentleman, immersed in his buttery-books and annoyed by the interruption, contented himself with answering: "The question, like the people, is buried. What is buried had best lie still." Margherita came out to her son in the hall: "He won't," she said with flashing eyes. "And yet the

whole place is mine." She went back to her occupation, which was teasing Florizel.

Reinout shrugged his shoulders and returned to his books. He had favourite authors nowadays, and they were fast moulding his opinions: Byron, Shelley, de Lamartine, the aristocrat singers of freedom, and that incomparable Seer who had first flashed the light o'er his path. Of the "Revolt of Islam," for instance, he could reel off whole passages, though never quite clear as to who revolted or against what. He had not spoken to Wendela again; sometimes, when happening to awake at night, he would erroneously imagine her standing alone by the chancel-window, as if Wendela ever broke promises, good or bad. But, as a rule, he slept excellently well, and awoke in the morning, from a dreamless slumber, to dream.

"My dear Count," said M. de Souza one day, the quiet old gentleman who did nothing but dance attendance on the Countess and complain of the weather. "Things are going wrong with René. He is nearly nineteen and he reads in the woods. Your system was wise, but you are prolonging it—excuse me—unwisely. He is farouche."

The Count tapped the ground nervously with his foot. "The other man says he is doing excellently," he replied, "and hopes to get him ready for his diplomatic examination in eighteen months more." The "other man" was one of those silent haters of the rich who fawn upon them. A republican himself, he tried imperceptibly to influence his pupil. The pupil distrusted him.

Count Rexelaer, while rejecting advice, set himself

quietly to watch his son. And these observations soon culminated abruptly in the question: "Why do you never go and see so-and-so, Reinout? And so-and-so? Or what's-his-name?"

"Oh, bother what's-his-name," said René.

"Still, it seems to me, that, as young men of your own rank——"

"I hate young men of my own rank."

The following academical year found Reinout at Leyden. A foreign university is not a nice place. To enjoy its life you must be both exceedingly childish and exceedingly dissolute. The pupil of M. de Souza found himself utterly at sea, and retired into his shell, which he beautified by all the means in his power. To say that at this period he resembled his hero Shelley would be to create an erroneous impression, yet, with his far greater (hearsay) knowledge of "society," he had much of that poet's splendidly ignorant scorn of the conventionalities which galled him. He was full of a passive yearning for the Millennium, the Apotheosis of the Human by itself which Victor Hugo believes to be an approaching fact. He had no clear notion how the thing was to be started, but, meanwhile, he bought statuettes and engravings, and studied a little art, and disliked dirt and beggars (always giving to the latter), and loved the poor. The young men at the University did not share his horror of dirt (some kinds), and they loved the poor in a less platonic manner than he. They said he was queer. That was the greatest of sins in their eyes, for they were all exactly alike.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE IRON HAND.

"I SHOULD like to speak to you for a moment, Father, if you please," said Reinout one memorable autumn evening, as the family rose from table. He was now twenty-two, and had spent four lazy, luxurious years at Leyden. He was handsome and well-dressed, and outwardly pleasingly proper.

"Certainly, my boy," responded Count Rexelaer graciously. "Come and have a cigar." Inwardly he said: "Debts?" Few fathers of undergraduates would have required the interrogation.

Reinout placed himself leisurely in front of the mantelpiece and deliberately lighted his pipe. He had come down unexpectedly to Deynum.

"I took my degree to-day," he said quietly, pressing down the burning tobacco with his fusee.

"What?" cried the Count in a tone of genuine indignation. "And how about your farewell-banquet? Reinout, you are joking."

Inviolable custom requires that the Dutch student shall leave the University in a blaze of prescriptive festivity. In justice to Reinout it must be added that the whole thing, like all Dutch student-festivals except the "Masquerade," means merely: drink.

"There wasn't any farewell-party," replied the

young man. "I'm not going to have one. I think it's a bore."

Then he took his eyes off his pipe and looked anxiously across at his father.

Count Rexelaer did not return the look. He sat gazing moodily into the fire; the autumn night was chilly. At length he said in quite a sad voice: "I was poor, and I had eleven four-in-hands."*

A moment afterwards he added: "You must have gone to a lot of other men's parties, and it seems very shabby to make no return. Perhaps the matter doesn't strike you in that light? I'm sure I don't know how it strikes you."

"On that score you may make yourself easy," replied his son. "I never went to anybody's parties. I joined some of the better societies, of course, but when I discovered the men were always getting drunk, I stopped away. Besides, I'm the first of my year to leave."

"You must have done nothing but work!" cried the Count.

"No, indeed; or I should have gone a year sooner."

"I rejoice that I have so clever a son." Count Hilarius rose and walked to the door. "You must have understood, Reinout," he said, with one of his irritable glances, "that I did not send you to the University to rush through it. Your news has taken me disagreeably by surprise. You must allow me a little time to digest it."

* Dutch University Custom.

"I have no debts," began Reinout.

"I wish you had," said his father bitterly, and closed the door.

Reinout remained standing, a meditative, graceful, regretful figure, with drooping pipe. He had expected some pleasure from the announcement of his sudden and successful termination of a career he had loathed from the first. "The Chevalier and Victor Hugo," he was wont to aver, "surely that is enough education for any man. The Chevalier for the fictions and Hugo for the realities." He was shocked now by the sincerity of the Count's disappointment. Unfortunately he could never understand how clear, to the man himself, were the Court Comptroller's lights.

"Ah well!" he said listlessly, and opened the door because the room was so hot. Then he took up a number of the "*Bibliothèque Universelle*"; the smoking-room table was covered with reviews;—his doing; "As long as you leave me my *Figaro*," his father had said.

Laïssa's voice sounded across the vestibule, singing softly to her mistress:

"O rose, ô fleur, ô jeune fille!"

With an exclamation of impatience the son of the house crossed over to the door again and shut it.

Next morning the Count did not put in an appearance, but M. de Souza dawdled over his coffee-cup, with hands as transparent as the porcelain, humming and hawing and gently coughing as he sopped his roll. Margherita always breakfasted in her room. "I can take nothing before noon," she protested, "but chocolate."

So she had a big bowl of that, with an abundance of cream and half a dozen French almond-cakes.

For a long time the Chevalier said nothing. He was too perfect a gentleman to "make conversation," unless it was wanted. Besides, he was growing old, and the difficulty of disguising this fact at table sufficiently engrossed him. At length he began flicking a crumb or two from his sleeve.

"Your father has told me, René," he said gently. "Of course he is grieved; so am I. You disappoint all our hopes. They were many."

Reinout listened humbly. He might despise the old nobleman's teachings; the teacher he could never otherwise than love.

"That, perhaps, might appear of but little account to you——"

"No, indeed," interrupted Reinout eagerly.

The Chevalier waved his hand. "So I willingly believe. Disregard of the feelings of others, that most vulgar of faults, has never been yours. But I was desirous to add: You disappoint your own hopes as well. Your father says he does not know *what* you want. Nor do I. But of one thing I am sure; you want to be a good man, and a great. Good, certainly; great, probably. Is it not so?"

"I am much obliged for your kind opinion of me," murmured Reinout.

"Not a bit. We know each other, we two. Well, you insist upon going your own way to your object. You refuse all advice; you reject all precedent; you are eccentric, *new*. It is an immense responsibility. If you fail, it is you, personally, that bear the blame.

Most men prefer that their faults should be those of the system they live in. And there is every chance of your failing. Whatever may be permissible at the end of a great career, nothing, at the beginning, is so fatal as eccentricity."

Reinout sat chipping a crust on his plate, with a vigour which scattered the crumbs.

"And, my dear boy,"—the Chevalier bent forward, kindly confidential, "I think you have hardly realized how great that career is likely to be. You are placed, by an Almighty Providence, on a summit, destined to influence the history of your country, and benefit your compatriots. You turn and, in quest of the sunlight above you, you deliberately walk downhill. Once more, the responsibility you assume single-handed is immense."

"My God!" cried the pupil, with suddenly uplifted eyes. "I assume no responsibility! I only want to leave off being a gilded gentleman and to become a manly man at last."

M. de Souza paused, in the act of rising, his keen eye filling with affection. "Be thankful," he said, "that your chains are gilded. We all have to wear them. I had not half your chances, René. I threw them away. And I am—here." He wheezed a little—his asthma was very bad of late—and then tottered, with his failing dance-step, from the room.

Reinout remained alone, twisting the seal-ring upon his little finger. "The velvet glove," he muttered.

A few minutes later he met his father in the hall. The Count held a newspaper in his hand.

"It is true, then," said the Count, and pointed to

the paper. "Do you know, Reinout, to the last I half hoped you were joking."

"I should not have ventured."

"The reality is worse than the joke could have been. And your academic dissertation? Am I to be permitted to see that?"

"I have a copy for you in my portmanteau," replied Reinout. He had meant to give it to his father the night before. "Hang it all," he thought, "I ought to have let him have the thing before he asked for it." "Father," he continued aloud, "I am sorry to have vexed you. I—I daresay I am a bit of a fool at times. I will do whatever you desire."

"My good child!" cried Hilarius, jerking round at the foot of the great staircase, among the oleanders, and facing his stalwart son, "you talk as if *I* were your enemy! I desire nothing but that, while you are preparing for your appointment as 'attaché,' you 'go out,' this winter, like other young men! And, look here, René, I'll give you a phaeton and pair of your own."

Reinout clasped his father's proffered hand and wrung it silently. And his heart was soft with love and shame.

CHAPTER XIV.

COUNT REXELAER'S TROUBLES.

COUNT REXELAER was, at heart, a melancholy man. But he was also constitutionally a grumbler, whose ever-anxious ambition no good fortune could appease. And to his honour be it said that he confined all his grumbling to his family-circle, while heroically smiling all day at Court.

And every man has his troubles; at least, so every man says. At Court the Count's sun was still in the ascendant, but at Deynum it had never fought its way out of the clouds. Truth to tell, Count Hilarius was not born to country-squiredom. His neighbours laughed when he stuck in the mud with his varnished boots, and shot a setter. He bullied his farmers in the wrong way, and patronized indiscreetly, and whatever he did "different" was writ down to the good of his predecessor. A vacancy having occurred in the States Provincial, the Count and the Baron were pitted against each other, much to the latter's initial dismay. And the Lord of the Manor actually found himself beaten by eight votes, chiefly through Baron Borck's remaining neutral at the eleventh hour. "It is not a Parliament-election; let the poor old man have this small compensation," the Baron of Rollingen had obstinately

replied to all his wife's appeals. She did not argue with him. She had tried that during the first year of their marriage.

The defeated Candidate, in his fury, talked of shutting up the Castle, to avoid contact with his rival. And this unfortunate election only accentuated the religious squabble which had so long agitated the village; trust an election in Holland to do that. The Protestant minister, Count Rexelaer's protégé, who had zealously visited the voters, found but one word of counsel for his patron in defeat. "You must strengthen the Protestant element," he said. Count Rexelaer reflected that eight votes are not much. He did all in his power to strengthen the Protestant element. Father Bulbius wept tears of indignation, and then he girded on his sword. Meanwhile the tragi-comedy of birth and death played through its little scenes beneath the shadow of the cross.

The Countess Margherita also commenced, about this time, to cause her noble consort—"O Hilaire! O mon roy"—some considerable anxiety. As she grew older and her charms began to wane—she was not yet forty and still sufficiently handsome—her extravagances deepened beyond the bounds of risibility, and a coquetry revealed itself of which her younger beauty had perhaps not felt the need. From indifference concerning society she had passed to fondness for it, and from fondness to an incessant craving after gaiety. "I must make the most of my sunset," said the passionate Creole, who borrowed her metaphors from the god she adored. She laced tightly of evenings, after the morning's sweets and sofas, and she powdered her yellow-

ing complexion while mercilessly displaying it. The "abandon" of her manners was charming, so delightfully un-Dutch. "Oh yes, she is a La Jolais, but—well, her mother died early. She was educated out in South America where her father was Ambassador."

The Rexelaers van Altena had not, on their part, pleased the Head of the House as much as wise Duty required of them. Jane had had any number of children and was obliged to rent a large house in a bad part of the town. Her rich father-in-law, who had suffered, at the time of the engagement, from a cough warranted to kill in a year, was now coughing his way up into the eighties. He was horribly stingy and had behaved outrageously to his son, whose allowance he diminished proportionately at the birth of every child.

Then, Rolline had married a poor Jonker for love. "You!" her grandmother had snapped at her, "who are so fond of nice things!" "I think being in love is a very nice thing," Rolline had answered, undaunted. "I saw Jane's marriage work round." Her mother had resisted her as long as was practicable. The worst of it was, they had to forgive her afterwards; her husband was so very well connected.

Antoinette was still at home; she had grown up pretty, if a little pert in expression. She was to capture her cousin Reinout.

Guy also was to capture a cousin. His mother had long ago explained to him that he must marry Cécile Borck's sixty thousand pounds; he was weary of hearing her explain. Perhaps, although nearly thirty, he was bent upon previously increasing his debts, his

"persuaders," as he openly called them. "My dear mother," he said, "I am not yet sufficiently persuaded." Mevrouw Rexelaer did not comprehend.

As for George, "He is the stupid one," said the Dowager. "It's the stupid ones that most surely look after their own. Some day, with that quiet way of his, George will make, or take a fortune."

"Meanwhile," protested the placid Judge, "let Hilarius go driving in his carriages, and leave us to our cabs. I am sure we are comfortable enough." In which view the whole family, though eager for the carriages, concurred, excepting Jane, who was soured by her irrationally unfortunate circumstances. "I should not have minded a reasonable contretemps," said Jane. "And what do you call a reasonable contretemps?" queried her husband, who was somewhat afraid of her. "Your father's living to be seventy, not eighty," replied plain-spoken Jane. So clearly had this couple got to understand one another.

As soon as the great people remained away from the village, the village began to miss them, and one half of it railed at the other half. Therefore, when they returned after eighteen months' absence, Joost Hakkert was hot to propose floral arches of welcome, which the Baron's faction as vehemently denounced. None regretted these dissensions as much as that gentleman himself. His bitterness had melted away from him, notably after his election to the States.

"My good Thys," he said one day to that prosperous husband and father, whom he met on returning from what had now become his daily walk in the park,

"you are acting ungraciously and unwisely. I tell you so frankly, for I know you mean well. And what you are doing is *not* done on my behalf." Thys scowled. We do not like Herod, of all men, to bring under our notice the fact that we are busy out-Heroding him.

But the Baron, having eased his conscience, continued his way content. He found Bulbius and the Baroness comfortably engaged in alternate monologue of reminiscence, Wendela bravely enduring the talk about Deynum. The Baron's entrance stopped it.

The Baroness Gertrude was ageing rapidly. She had always been in advance of her years, and the last decade might surely count for two. She would look for her words, till her daughter tapped the floor with impatient, self-reproachful foot.

"I disapprove of all opposition to constituted authorities," said the Baron, walking into the room. "I wish these good people would listen to me. We ought to have no point of contact with the Castle. As it cannot be love, it should never be hate."

Wendela looked up quickly. "Why not a little hate?" rose to her lips, but she was grown up now and sometimes suppressed her rashest thoughts.

"You are too charitable, Mynheer," burst forth Father Bulbius. "As for me, I have no patience with persecutors. For I call it persecution to compel this poor lady, in her infirmity, to drag all the way to the other end of the village."

"Stay to dinner," said the Baron, to whom this subject was especially obnoxious. "I will tell Gustave." And he rang the bell.

"Nonsense, Father; you speak as if I were losing

the use of my limbs," interposed Mevrouw van Rexelaer nervously. "Like Joost Hakkert's old mother."

"No, no," replied the priest pettishly, "I did not mean that. By the by, I was telling Mevrouw, when your Worship came in, that I had been to see Lise of the Chalk-house Farm, who has just had twins."

"Tiens, and he never told me!" exclaimed the Baron, vexed that Thys should have been so much vexed.

"Did your Reverence kiss the babies?" questioned Wendela.

She liked to provoke Father Bulbius, having retained her aversion to priests. "It all comes," she would say, "of that unconscionable catechism."

"I? No," cried his Reverence in alarm. "Besides, they were girls."

"But then, old Vrouw Hakkert is twenty years older than I," continued the Baroness. "At that age people cannot complain, if their strength begins to give way."

The Baron went over to her chair and gently stroked her white forehead. "You are still young," he said.

When Count Rexelaer's carriage, shortly after, passed under a red-lettered "Welcome," he was not particularly gratified to learn from his steward that he owed its erection to the Baron's forbearance. Besides, "unusual demonstrations have exceptional causes," declared the ex-diplomat. He felt that the old lord was much in his way. What would he have said, had he known how that gentleman was steadfastly schooling

himself to play the rôle of a humble petitioner? Yet, so it was. For, when duties became plain to the simple-hearted Baron, he did them. And one morning the White Baroness returned from her daily pilgrimage to the distant parish-church, leaning heavily on Wendela's arm, even more than usually exhausted.

"I cannot," the proud, silent woman had gasped as she tottered to her bed-chamber. Presently Wendela came back to the sitting-room where her father was tramping stolidly to and fro. Had he noticed? she wondered, as she seated herself, with a book, in the window-seat. She had long understood that her mother's ailment was some sort of rheumatic or chalky gout, a gradual stiffening of the joints.

"This must end," exclaimed the Baron without checking his walk. He seemed to have forgotten his daughter's presence. Five minutes' more tramp were got through, before he spoke again. "I'll go this afternoon," he said. "There's a reason for it now." He walked out at the open door, and locked himself in his room.

Left alone, Wendela slipped off the window-sill and out of the house. She hurried up the lane, and into the coppice which leads to Lady Bertha's oak.

"He shall not so humiliate himself," she repeated. "He shall not so humiliate himself." She passed the oak without daring to look at it. Here, eight years ago, she had parted from Piet Poster, the boy-sweet-heart whose name still hung motionless in the prayers she repeated by rote. Unlike her father, she had never beheld the oak, nor the house, nor the gardens since that day when she had bidden them Good-bye.

How long ago was it, that she had crept up the avenue to catch one last glimpse of "Knight-Pilgrim"? Five years. Often she had wondered if Reinout still retained the dear volume she had given him. "I had done better to keep it," she thought.

Was it fancy that told her she remembered each stone of the building as soon as it came into view? She sped onward, with beating heart, across the courtyard, between the orange-trees, and rang the loud door bell with a crash.

"You must be mistaken again. I wish you would pay more attention," said the ever-cautious Count Rexelaer to the servant who announced her. Then he went into the vestibule and found himself confronted by a lithe, hazel-eyed damsel in a light muslin dress.

"I am the Freule van Rexelaer," said the damsel with a quiver in her earnest voice. "No, thank you, I would rather remain here."

"And what can I do for you, Freule?"

She told him.

Count Rexelaer fretted indignantly under his efforts at self-control. He believed in a ruse of the enemy invented to render refusal impossible. "Will you allow me," he demanded, "to consider the matter and communicate my reply?"

"No," said Wendela quickly. "I mean, I hope not. I am longing to surprise them. It was that made me come."

"My dear young lady," said the Count, "who could resist so fair a petitioner?"

"You consent then, Mynheer?" cried Wendela with sparkling eyes.

"If your father really wishes it, yes," he replied pointedly, and then, in obedience to a motion of her hand, he drew back the glass-door.

She ran all the way home. In the garden she met the Baron. "I have been to Deynum," she panted.

"To Deynum?" Her father did not understand what she meant.

"I have been calling on the Count. He is an amiable gentleman, too amiable, Papa."

But that evening came a letter from Count Hilarius van Rexelaer. He had consented, of course, where refusal had been rendered impossible, and if the Baron was really content to extort a concession, well, Count Rexelaer, having once passed his word, must admit himself bound.

"Oh, but this is infamous!" cried Wendela with burning cheeks.

"My dear," replied the Baron mildly, "the gentleman is true to our motto. Perhaps he enjoys disgrace. Never mind; I shall accept."

"Oh, you dear, dear Father," she said, and threw both arms round his neck.

CHAPTER XV.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND OTHER PEOPLE'S BUSINESS.

TRUE to his promise, the Jonker Reinout returned with his parents to the Hague. And, decked out with ribands and flowers—white ties and gardenias—he was led, like a lamb, to the slaughter.

In the morning hours he worked resolutely at the Foreign Office, helping to wind and unwind the red tape with which international knots are tied and untied. At the University he had early discovered that the study of civil law means the study of casuistry to avoid it; these pains were superfluous, diplomacy soon told him, with regard to the professor's elaborate *jus gentium*. "Let the professor look after the law," said the Minister, his father's friend, Count L——, "and we will take care of the profits." Reinout's virgin acquaintance with statecraft befell in those days when the affluent doctrine of "might is right" was leisurely overspreading the sand-centred tower of the Holy Alliance. The ante-Alexandrian teaching that right is one thing and a good, might another and a better, was dead past revival; Bismarckian effrontery had not yet persuaded a hyper-civilised, hyper-covetous community that a man may serve God well by serving his neighbour right. Europe was waiting for a compromise between her

popularised politics and her increasing morality, and meanwhile "the two have nothing in common" was the catchword with which she strove to content herself. "Oh my God, help me to understand!" prayed Reinout van Rexelaer.

In the afternoon and evening, and night-time, when the slow hours tolled for making merry, he dragged about from place to place after either parent, or more rarely after both. The Countess was now become an indefatigable pleasure-hunter, gobbling gaiety like a lap-dog which foresees the withdrawal of its mess. "René, mon petit, es-tu prêt?"—night after night he would see his mother standing in the doorway, with fan or opera-glass, and he would lay down his book and follow her.

"Of course he knew everyone, willy-nilly. His father had secured his election to those clubs from which nobody is excluded, as well as those clubs to which nobody, unless not a nobody, gains admittance. This latter emprise had called for a little manœuvring. There were plenty of young men who remembered that Rexelaer, at College, had deemed himself too good to get drunk. But people fought shy of offending the Count, high at Court and soon destined to be higher.

With the ladies of the Residency, as the Dutch call the Hague, Reinout was far more successful, and also more at his ease. In the first place, women openly loved him for one of the chief causes of masculine dislike: he was by far the best "parti" in society. He might have been endowed with round shoulders, or even with a wooden leg. As for a wooden head, that "goes without saying." And yet he was as good-look-

ing and generous-hearted as if these things had been worth his while. Besides, while he had long since abandoned the graceful, obsolete forms which the Chevalier had taught him, he had unconsciously preserved much of the manner of that gentleman's courtlier day. He could still think, and even speak, of a woman with reverence.

In many ways, otherwise, his education had been a gigantic failure. He had fingered the gilt clay-ball his father had laid in his boyish palm till all the gilding came off. That was not what the Count, himself so successfully worldly, had bargained for. He had wished his son to despise men, that he might freely employ them as means to an end. He had not expected him to despise the end as well as the means.

Meanwhile the young man rode round in the whirligig of pleasure, and got his fair share of enjoyment out of it. He was by no means above dancing and flirting, or racing and riding. But at bed-time especially, like Titus, he would feel that he had lost a day. "I have never done anything for anybody. I am twenty-three, and if I were to die before sunrise, my life would have been a blank!" It would always remain so. There is no more futile occupation conceivable on earth than the diplomatic representation of a state with no international influence. But it could not be helped. For there is also no prison like "position."

One morning the young aspirant ambassador, upon reaching the Office, was struck by a look of unusual redness about the eyes of the old door-keeper there.

The discovery startled him: he did not remember having ever seen the symptoms of sorrow on the face of a grown-up man. He would have spoken; but the sacredness of sorrow sealed his lips.

He spent the morning in hard work. They had put him into the passport-department, and there, amid the muddle of international births, marriages and deaths, he might watch the woof of History. A delightful squabble had recently arisen like a ripple upon stagnancy, because a tourist's auburn locks had been written down red. The gentleman was exceedingly abusive, from the safe side of the frontier, and actually offered personal violence to his Excellency. Whereupon Reinout most humbly submitted his willingness to go out to Italy as proxy. His Excellency frowned. He had two frowns at his service: a shrewdly puzzled one and a solemnly determined. The two had made him minister.

By noon the usher's eyes had lost their border, but it was he who broached his trouble, as he swung back the door.

"This'll be the last day, Jonker," he said.

"How so?" questioned Reinout in surprise.

Then the man told him. An order misunderstood; a door left unlocked with important papers behind it; the peace of the nation in danger; more than twenty years' service and dismissal at the end.

"It's a great pity you did it," said Reinout severely. "I suppose there's no hope?"

The man shook his white head pathetically. "Ah, if you only knew," he said, "I misunderstood the order,

Jonker, because I was intended to misunderstand. There, there; it's no use talking."

Nothing more definite could be extracted from him. He muttered something about "a candidate before there was a vacancy" and "a man's servants are nearer to his hand than the state's." The Jonker turned helplessly away. He felt himself again in the presence of one of those immense little abuses which seem to be society's daily bread. He was fast learning to believe that all human flocks are tended by wolves in shepherd's clothing. No need any longer to speculate what the lean wretch had meant with whom he had parleyed as a lad. "A thousand poor men's tortures go to make a single rich man's comfort." What can one do? Solve the riddle? Are not all the world's best and wisest, at this moment, floundering in the marshes of solution, lured by every Jack o' Lantern that shines bright?

"I shall tell my father about this," reflected Reinout. His father was to him an upright pillar of power. Not a lamp-post of futurity, but an Atlas that bore the existent world. According to a father's fallible lights, the Count could be trusted to do present-day right. Reinout believed in his father.

There was to be a small dinner-party at home that evening in honour of Margherita's birthday. A family party, the Rexelaers van Altena, and a couple of intimates, sixteen in all. Count Rexelaer had frowned over one name. "It is absurd," he had said, "to ask that man on such an occasion as this." Margherita had laughed in his face. But an hour or two later she had invited her husband into her menagerie.

"Mon cher," she had commenced, "I should like to recount you a little anecdote."

"Well?" said Hilarius, nervously snatching at Amarinda's tail.

"Don't hurt more creatures than you can help. You remember, Hilarius, how desperately melancholy I was when you first brought me to your land of everlasting twilight. You knew at the time; but I don't think it ever interfered with your digestion. Well, one evening I had been crying and said something to Laïssa about feeling I was going to die. The poor foolish creature, in extravagant anguish, appealed to the Chevalier, and the Chevalier came and mingled his tears with mine and confessed that he too was dying for want of a ray of sunshine. You need not scowl; he is a better man than you. You, by the by, were in Amsterdam 'on business.' I have noticed that your business more commonly calls you to Brussels now. I was desperate with home-sickness; I resolved to start by the night-train and take ship at Hâvre; I promised the Chevalier to let him accompany me. Everything was arranged, and when the time came, I woke the boy. He looked up at me, drunk with early sleep. 'Are we going to Papa?' he asked. Suddenly I seemed to realize"—the Countess's harsh voice faltered—"the disgrace which, innocent though I was, an esclandre would bring upon the child. I sent for the Chevalier and told him he must go alone. I still see him bend over my hand. "An old sinner can live where an angel can," he said. Ridiculous logic, was it not? Besides, I have never been an angel. Far from it. And two days later you returned from Amsterdam."

"I do not understand——" began the Count hurriedly.

"To-day I am forty. Somehow we have drifted astray from our only child, or he from us. But a woman of forty will certainly consider the position of her son, even sooner than a woman of twenty. Ay and her own."

"And her husband's!" cried the Count, rising as if to escape.

"And her husband's. The money is mine, and it pays for your trips to Brussels."

"Have you anything else," asked Hilarius at the door.

"Just one word. You will have the grace, I feel sure, not to refer to this very old story in the presence of the Chevalier."

"The Chevalier has behaved very badly," exclaimed Hilarius. "I thought he was a trusty friend."

"He behaved like a true cavalier to a woman in distress. Nothing more. Understand me, Hilarius; this matter ends here. And also, I am now a woman of forty. I have wasted my whole life in your horrible country. I have shown that I, like yourself, can be trusted to keep up appearances. As for the rest, it is no business of yours. You will allow me, if you please, to do what I choose with the remnant of my youth and my happiness." She threw herself back on the sofa and waved both her hands to her birds. The whole chorus of them responded to the signal, and Count Rexelaer retired from the scene in a burst of joyous song.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MYSTERIOUS POET.

A COUPLE of hours later Margherita, in amber velvet, was receiving the congratulations of her husband's kin. Reinout had bought her a brooch, with the florins obtained by brief betting at a Club écarté-table. Rolline stood admiring it wistfully under one of the huge lace lamp-shades.

Mevrouw Elizabeth Rexelaer came sailing in, with her judge among her skirts. When Mevrouw Elizabeth entered a room, there was no vacancy in it during the first few moments for anyone else; to-day, by the time she had settled down, it became apparent that the master of the house had slipped in after her. He was in excellent spirits. "I have got some splendid news!" he said.

"Splendid for us?" asked Jane.

"Splendid for all, my dear, in so far as we all hang together."

"Ah, but we don't," murmured Jane, in a spiteful aside to her brother George. "Thank Heaven, we are not yet *all* dependent on Uncle Hil."

"Oh, shut up," replied handsome George. He had recently succeeded in extracting a loan from his uncle, to the envious admiration of the rest. The latter gentle-

man was offering his arm to his sister-in-law. The company rustled into pairs. And as they did so, the fond mother pointed to Reinout and Antoinette: "How charming they look," she whispered. "Yes, don't they?" responded Count Rexelaer hastily. The heir-apparent of Deynum, restricted like Royalty, must choose from among half a dozen high-born maidens that humbly awaited his pleasure. He might be gracious to Topsy meanwhile, if he chose.

Everybody should be gracious to everybody. Mevrouw Elizabeth was delighted with Hilarius's expansive complaisance. "It is that low-born Margaret who spoils him," she reflected. "And now, my dear brother, tell us your news!"

Hilarius was eager to do so. A silence fell upon all the nephews and nieces as he told. "It has pleased his most gracious Majesty"—the Courtier's face assumed a fold of half ironical humility—"to confer the exalted post left vacant by Count Frank de Bercy's death upon his Majesty's faithful servant—*me!*"

Of course there was an outburst of perfunctory congratulation. But if anybody really cared, it was the old Chevalier. "The blessed saints be with him!" mumbled that perfumed relic in his immaculate shirt-front. And mentally he added, "If blessed saints there be."

The Judge rose and toasted "His Excellency!" and the yellow-robed Creole beside him looked up with a vainglorious smile. Yes, it was nice. They all felt it was nice. "Admit that it is," said Topsy, turning her pretty, plucky little head towards her neighbour. "Oh, nice enough," replied Reinout, "Pharaoh's footman pro-

moted to the place of Pharaoh's butler deceased." But the girl only laughed at him. "You are very young," she declared. "You may always say those things to me."

In the smoking-room Count Rexelaer had to listen to the lisped congratulations of the gentleman whose presence he had striven to prevent, an attaché at the French Legation, "my compatriot," averred Margherita, "model yourself, my dear child, on the manners of Monsieur de Bonnaventure." Reinout had slipped away from an endless tale of his eldest cousin's gambling losses and taken refuge with the ladies, two of whom were differing politely on every subject they approached, while Jane sat buried in a pile of much-coveted reviews and Rolline lay back dreaming of her dear little peach of a baby, all sweet and soft and good to eat. It was a relief when the gentlemen came upstairs, Count Rexelaer with a bundle of newly-arrived letters in his hand. His Excellency halted in the middle of the room. "Margherita," he said, while avoiding his wife's eyes, "I am very much annoyed. I have just heard from Dievert that the people I so unwisely re-admitted to the chapel have kept some sort of religious anniversary there. A Catholic service, in fact."

"This is truly shocking," said Mevrouw Elizabeth, from among the perplexed audience, in her most impressive tones.

"Oh, I daresay they only celebrated mass," interposed Margherita lightly. She was angry about the reopening of the chapel, because it had been refused to herself. "Do not let us quarrel about religion, pray."

"It is not a question of religion, but a question of decency!" fumed the Count. "The old Barebones does nothing but tease me with his tranquil impertinence. I would give a good sum, could I drive him from Deynum!"

He squeaked out the words in his irritation. Margherita caught a smile of careless contempt beneath the French diplomat's waxed moustache. She appealed to him to create a diversion. "C'est bête," she said, "has nobody anything amusing?"

Jane wheeled round from her table. "Here are these verses," she interposed, "that people are talking about, in the 'Revue Parisienne.' Have you seen them, aunt Margaret, you who are such a lover of poetry?"

"No. Read them to us," replied Margherita, glad of any escape.

"Oh, poetry!" murmured Guy, and, winking at Reinout, he wandered away to pause vacantly in front of a female statuette. Reinout at the first mention of the review and the poem, had fallen back hastily into impenetrable shade.

The poem was a short one in honour of an incident much discussed at the time. In a South American republic—of all places!—a murderer's execution had been twice interrupted by the breaking of the rope; whereupon the mob had invaded the scaffold and rescued the criminal, actuated, said the poet, by an impulse of heaven-born pity. "Brotherly sympathy," though perhaps a shade more accurate, would hardly have rhymed so well with—the sentiments of the singer.

Hitherto, said the poet, all light had arisen in the East, and he appealed to the nations of Europe to be foremost in heralding the day-break of mercy. Else would its morning be not sunlight but storm.

“Car c’est dans l’occident que l’ouragan s’élève
Dont la grande marée effacera la Grève!”

Jane read well, and therefore enjoyed reading whether people listened or not. She had rung out the last lines with real spirit. Why did Reinout, in the silence which followed, shrink still farther back?

“It ends in a pun,” said the diplomat. “That is bad.”

“A pun! No; where?” cried Mevrouw Elizabeth. Her daughter hastily intervened. “The whole thing is modelled on Victor Hugo,” she said. “Capital punishment is his hobby. But it is attracting a great deal of notice, and I think it is distinctly good.”

“It isn’t poetry at all,” complained Margherita. “It is merely rhymed talk about politics. Poetry deals with the nobler affections.”

The diplomatist beside her bowed low over her fan. “You have expressed it exactly,” he said.

“The sentiments are French,” declared Mevrouw Elizabeth, “and would meet with no sympathy here.”

“You think not?” asked Reinout’s voice from the depths of a bay window. He came slowly back into the light. “As it happens,” he said, “I can favour you, if you like, with a translation of Jane’s poem. I bought it, by the merest chance, on my way home this afternoon.” And, drawing a newspaper from his pocket,

with a word of apology to the Frenchman, he gave them the whole thing over again.

"That is how it sounds in Dutch," he said.

"And very ugly too," said Margherita.

"The translation is not half bad," protested sententious Jane, "whom is it by?" George yawned audibly. Simmans had taken the paper from Reinout's hand. "Queer literature," he said, "for the Jonker van Rexelaer," and passed it on to the Count. That gentleman glanced at the title, and dropt the red-hot, revolutionary coal.

Reinout laughed. Mevrouw Elizabeth smilingly shook a substantial finger. "René, René!" she said. "You are an enfant terrible. But we know it is only your fun."

"What is it all about?" inquired the judge, pulling himself together and definitely waking up. "What has Reinout got there? I suppose it is the 'Cry of the People.' Well, Simmans, we have it at the Law Courts and the Ministries. I agree with him; it is far better to know what these foolish people say."

"Oh, the socialists, you know!" remarked Rolline's Jonker, screwing his eye-glass tight.

His fond young wife stretched forth her fan to playfully tap his arm. "Don't," she said, "you horrid boy."

But Simmans was resolved to have his say. "It is different for us," he declaimed, "who stand forth to protect society. But Reinout is one of life's favoured butterflies. We, on the ramparts, must accustom ourselves to the smell of the powder."

"Yes, that is what I always feel," interposed Margherita, turning from her earnest conversation with her attaché. "The smell of poor people is so very disagreeable. It prevents one from being as kind as one might."

"But who is this Dutch revolutionary poet?" persisted Jane.

Simmans picked up the paper. "An anonymous hero," he answered, "who signs with a P. P stands for Peter or Paul."

"Probably Paul," put in Reinout. "A prince of revolutionaries, if men had but obeyed him!"

Half an hour later the Rexelaers van Altena were driving home. "A dull evening," opined Mevrouw Elizabeth. "Jane was stupid with her poem. And Reinout pushes his jokes too far."

"The salmi was good," replied the judge.

"Do you know, Mamma, I believe Reinout is in earnest?" said Antoinette.

"In earnest!" cried her mother, much flurried. "How? What do you mean? What did he say?"

Antoinette shrieked with laughter. "In earnest, I mean as regards the poor," she said as soon as she could speak.

"He knows nothing about the poor," retorted Mevrouw, turning away from her irritating daughter.

Guy and George, walking home together, discussed their relations with far greater freedom. They both agreed that the evening would have been most insuffer-

ably dull, but for the amusement of watching Margherita's "exotic vivacity."

"A flirt of forty!" remarked Guy. "I don't think Uncle Hil half likes it. The more fool he. Besides, he's got more than his share of luck already."

"Uncle Hil's not half a bad fellow," said George.

"I don't wonder you think so. I wish you'd tell me how you managed to extract all that money out of him."

"Ah, wouldn't you like to know," said George.

"Yes, I should. Truth to tell, I don't think there was any ruse about it. You're too stupid. You just asked him, and he said Yes."

"Perhaps so," replied George. "You might try it."

Reinout was putting on his overcoat in the hall, when his father came out to him.

"My dear boy," began the Count, "I have been wanting to say a few words to you for many days past. Of course you are quite welcome to spend your nights at the Club or wherever else you prefer to spend them. Only don't overdo it. Sometimes we see nothing of you for forty-eight consecutive hours. There, I am sure we understand each other. Exaggeration in all things is an evil. Good-night."

My Lord High Seneschal glided up to his bedroom, humming a bright little tune. Before extinguishing the light he nodded complacently to His Excellency in the glass, a mealy-faced, wiry haired Excellency in a night-shirt. And although he had forgotten the quotation which, ten years ago, had spurred him on to scorn the lowest rung of his Jacob's Ladder, yet the thought was

in his mind to-night. "So doth the greater glory dim the less." Nothing—absolutely nothing—was left him to desire. He sank into the blissful repose of an unshadowed success.

The Baron, at Deynum, laid down the Provincial Gazette with a smile.

CHAPTER XVII.

STAINS.

GEORGE REXELAER had always been Grandmamma Borck's favourite. "He was so delightfully stupid," she said; she did not add that she had retained a quondam beauty's weakness for good looks. Grandmamma Borck would have married George to Cécile,—George, not Guy—could she have afforded to let Cécile marry at all. "Come and tell me everything, George," she would say. "You're too weak to stand alone."

She even helped him with a little, carefully counted, money. It was Cécile's. And she resigned herself to his being "a man about town," in these days when the turnstile of "examination" guards the old paths of honour and glory. "There are other heiresses," she said, "besides Cécile."

But the heiresses held aloof—honest Dutch maidens—God bless them!—any one of them is worth six of the men. Once, indeed, the old woman succeeded in concocting an engagement, but in a month it was broken off. "I could marry a beautiful statue," said

the damsel frankly, "for a statue would not open its mouth now and then to say a foolish thing."

George was content not to care. Even in his salad days he had been as cool as a cucumber. "I want," he admitted, "to have a great deal of money; it's the sole thing I care for, and some day I shall manage it. I know I could get it now, if they would but let me alone." "How?" the Dowager once asked him. "In business," said stupid George. The old lady laughed herself purple.

But a couple of months later he came to her with an important face and a tiny parcel. He had a habit of conversing with everyone on his slow life's journey—in trains, on steamers, in places of amusement—"for want," Jane used to tell him, "of something to say." Well, that morning he had been to Delft, in the barge, and had come across a sailor just returned from the Indies, and that sailor had proved the happy possessor of a magnificent secret which he was desirous to share, for a consideration, with somebody else. He had told George all about it, except, of course, the secret itself. Having strayed from his ship, it appears, on the coast of New Guinea, this man had fallen into the hands of a tribe of Papuans—the genuine Tatuas—Papuans—and the Tatuas had tattooed him all over, in their own peculiar manner, and he had lived among them and done duty as a medicine-man. The tattooing of the Tatuas is of course ineradicable, but they paint themselves also with paints, greases and gums, and these paintings the sailor perceived they could easily remove by means of a plant called Papú. In fact, each lady used to be done up fresh from time to time, said the

sailor, when the spring fashions came in; his own wife had shown him the trick. He had escaped from the tribe, and had got back to Europe, bringing the secret away with him, though not the wife, and here that secret was. He had extracted a dirty green lump from his pocket and shown it to George. "Warranted," he said, "to remove all stains, spots, blots, and blemishes on the human complexion or any other soft material, silks, velvets, woollens, genuine kids, etc., etc. Will not clean pots and pans." Willing to dispose of it for three thousand florins down, and dirt cheap.

"I like the reservation," said the Dowager, after listening to this remarkable story. "I always think it looks so well in the advertisements. Throw away that dirty little ball, George. You know I have a horror of infection."

But foolish George had taken the matter seriously. Only three thousand florins, and a fortune to be made! "I assure you, grandma, there is something in it," he entreated, "I only wish you would let me shew you—" he bent forward, uplifting the little green ball between finger and thumb. "If only you had a grease-stain somewhere about you——" said George with scrutinising glances. But the Baroness's glossy black silk lay serene and spotless about her meagre limbs. "Nonsense," she said sharply. "Throw it away at once. And talk about something else."

But fools rush in—— exactly. "No, no, I *must* show you. It's too wonderful!" cried George. He caught up a pen from an inkstand at his grandmother's elbow and, before she could stop him, he had dropped a small blot on the crimson plush tablecloth. The

dowager screamed with indignation. She, who considered the smallest visible blemish the greatest of sins. "Only wait till it dries, Ma'am," expostulated George, "and I'll shew you——" She refused to be shewn. She ordered her grandson out of her presence. And he departed, leaving behind him, in his flurry the little green ball.

The Dowager remained in her chair, gasping with indignation before the black speck on the cloth and the antidote which the criminal had left lying beside it. She sat thus a long time, in utter disgust, and watched the ink dry; then, partly from curiosity, partly from inability to endure the sight of the stain any longer, she took up the little strong-smelling pea, in the most gingerly manner, with her skinny, slender fingers, and began slowly rubbing the spot beneath the fading light. Presently she got up to fetch a candle from her bureau, and Cécile, when she came in half an hour later, found her grandmother mopping ink all over the tablecloth.

Next morning George received an invitation to come and see his forgiving Granny. He found her in a most amiable mood, and they discussed pro's and con's in a business-like manner. "I am sure I could work it," reiterated George. But the far-seeing Dowager had doubts. "Why, you would have to spend a hundred thousand florins the first twelvemonth in advertisements alone!" she said. The great thing was to possess oneself of the secret. That done, the rest would "develop itself" by means of a company or, still better, a syndicate. But how raise, within twenty-four hours, the preliminary three thousand? "Unfortunately," said the cautious old lady, "I have barely a penny of my own."

"Uncle Hilarius?" suggested George, very doubtfully.

"I have been thinking of that"; she sat and pondered. "That little story you told me a month ago," she said presently, "about going to call on your aunt and running upstairs unannounced into her sitting-room. You remember, eh?"

"Of course I remember, Granny," said George with downcast eyes.

"I told you to lay it by and speak to nobody about it. Put it in the bank, so to say. Perhaps the time has come to take it out. But, mind you, only in case of extremest necessity, for of course it will cause unpleasantness. So use all your other arguments first. You understand? And now go and speak to your uncle."

"No, I don't quite understand," said George.

"Dear, dear, how stupid you are! I feel convinced you will die a Cræsus. Well, I must tell you more plainly." And she did.

When Count Rexelaer had listened to his nephew for fifteen seconds, he said: "No, he never lent anybody anything; it was quite against his principles. He only gave." Even George was not simple enough to suggest: "Then give." But he pushed his appeal nearly five minutes longer, till the Count said "No," again, so exceedingly irritably and with such ungracious additions that George felt the moment was come to expose this particular nephew's discreet claims to more consideration. "I think you owe me a good turn, Uncle Hil," he began, as his grandmother had instructed him, "if

only because——” And then the unhappy Comptroller of another and a more august household than his own found himself treated to that little story which had so much diverted the Dowager five weeks ago. How Nephew George had come to the house to call on Aunt Margherita, and how he had run up unannounced to the back drawing-room, and how——

When the enterprise was launched, in due time, it “took” almost immediately. The money had been found by a couple of wealthy contractors, of the name of Kohn, Abraham and Benjamin, who had become partners in the business of which George and one of the young Kohns were now managing directors. “Papuam! Papuam!” (as the new product was called) spread all over the country, with a placard exhibiting a bright-coloured Tatua-Papua washing the paint off one side of his face. They first advertised “Will not clean Metals!” again and again; nothing else. That was an idea of the Dowager’s, who entered into the fun of the thing and was responsible for two-thirds of her grandson’s success, “Papuam! Papuam! Will not clean Metals!” Everybody wanted to find out what it *would* clean. There was a young lady at the offices, always in attendance, most willing to shew you. You might spill whatever you wished to—in reason—on herself or her white satin dress. George was going to be an extremely wealthy man. He was as good as engaged to the daughter and heiress of Benjamin Kohn (no Jewish blood traceable), whose empty little heart went bumping up and down at the idea of a handsome husband and a coronet. And it must be confessed he worked hard at the business.

The delight of watching money breed seemed to have sharpened all his faculties. He sent round to every house in the Hague, a pea of the wonderful mixture with accompanying verses (which, bad as they were, he had *not* composed). The wooden seats in the public gardens and all the tramcar cushions everywhere were renovated—once—with Papuum. A cake of it was given away to any orphan-child that could prove its parent's demise to have preceded "the greatest discovery of the age." Thrice over an attempt was made to import genuine Tatuas to parade the streets and sit in the offices; they all died on the voyage, but even that was an advertisement. The chief difficulty consisted in breeding the plant fast enough in enormous conservatories. The supply gave out once, and that was by far the best advertisement of all. There was a perfect battery at the doors, and a clamour for Papuum!

And the noble, the illustrious Rexelaers, they were petrified by this disgrace to their immaculate name? They were, till they found that this Papuum produced not thousands but tens of thousands of florins, and then even Margherita remembered that the money, unlike its producer, "did not smell." Besides, now-a-days, there are but a couple of countries remaining in Europe—Austria for instance—where it is still possible to associate any earning of money with disgrace. Holland is not one of them. In the twentieth century there will be none at all.

The Rexelaers of Altena, the brother and sisters, chaffed George a little at first. They were always find-

ing specks on his clothes and crying out for "Papoosel!" Once Topsy even dabbed him with paint from her colour-box, but he soon frightened them, by his rages, into letting him alone. He permitted no allusion, out of business hours, to his business side. This rule the old lady had especially impressed upon him. He went out into society just the same, but only after four, and in the office he wore coronets on his cuff-studs. Many people compared him most favourably with his elder brother, Guy. But he could not prevent the roar of laughter which went up on all sides, when he accidentally sat down on a freshly painted seat, in the German minister's garden.

His father and mother were even pleased to sanction his engagement to Miss Kohn. Of course she must be considered "*faute de mieux*," but the match would consolidate the business. Unfortunately the Kohn family happened to be—of all things! — Roman Catholics. Mevrouw Elizabeth hesitated.

"They could not possibly be anything better," said her mother, whom she consulted. "It looks less Jewish than anything else. The girl's name, I hear, is Maria Christina, a very judicious selection. I should at once make a rule that she be known as Christina. You can say that there are Maries in the family already."

"But there are not, mamma?" remarked Mevrouw van Rexelaer.

"How tiresome you can be, Elizabeth," said the Dowager peevishly, "and so rude."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LADY'S DOLE.

"I'LL do it," said Count Rexelaer aloud. "I ought to have done it before. But I was always too good-natured."

A couple of hours later Notary Strum, at work in his office, received a telegraphic message summoning him to My Lord of Deynum's presence by eleven on the morrow morning.

He rose from his desk with a growl and lumbered across the little entrance-hall, to the room where his mother sat knitting, as ever.

"Here's a telegram," said Nicholas. "Order from Pacha to come up to town to-morrow. Never mind rain, hail, wind or snow. Pacha says: 'Come. I whistled.'"

"Oh, Nicholas, with your chill!" said the old woman, and laid down her work.

"Yes, *with* my chill!" retorted Nicholas. "I couldn't well go without."

"I suppose you must," said the widow thoughtfully. "You see his Excellency doesn't know you are indisposed. And it is a great privilege for you to act as the confidential adviser of so magnificent a patron, Nicky."

“‘Magnificent’ is the word,” replied Nicky, and went back to his office, banging the door.

All these years mother and son had jogged on side by side, or rather son a-top. “A wife and children would cost me a second servant,” reasoned the notary. “Mother looks after me and the maid.” But her company was not only convenience and complacency; for she had a maddening way of ignoring—from incompetency to comprehend them—all the dear fellow’s favourite fads of thought and expression, and having lived her whole life in submission to God, the priest and the gentlefolks, she could not remember that Nicholas believed, or said he believed, in the Almighty but vaguely, in her other divinities not at all. She would gladly have sacrificed her life for her son—in fact, she did so, in a long-drawn daily sacrifice—but she was incapable of sparing him her old-fashioned utterances, from which he vainly fled. If he grew ironical, she took him in earnest. If he flew out at her, she would meekly cite his father. Nicholas quoted his father at the clients, not to himself.

When Nicholas started next morning at daybreak, he was safely wrapped up and galoshed and comforted, and his mother came running after him, in the cold, with pocket-handkerchiefs and lozenges, of which he had already procured a supply. He sent her back with a growl.

He had the pleasure of travelling all the way to the Hague with a man who lamented “the decrease of deference in social relations.” He bore this with the fierce silence on which he had long nourished his spites and discontents. “No use quarrelling,” he would

tell himself, "with one's bread and butter, because the butter's bad."

His "magnificent patron" received him with unusual friendliness, even thanking him for coming. "I wonder what he wants," thought Strum.

Count Rexelaer immediately proceeded to enlighten him. "Strum, I am going to do it," said his Excellency in his hasty way. "I mean, about 'the Lady's Dole.' You were quite right. I ought never to have allowed them to settle again in Deynum."

The Notary's heart leapt within him. He forgot all about the cold or the discomfort of coming. For years he had vainly been endeavouring to convince Count Rexelaer, and now that fine gentleman, just like a fine gentleman, sent for him, in the middle of winter, to say: "I am convinced!" No matter; he would be avenged on his enemy at last.

"I am greatly relieved," he said, blinking cheerfully behind his glasses. "Your Excellency knows with what increasing compunction I have paid the annual instalments where they were no longer due." In his heart he wondered: What has happened to set his Excellency still more against the Baron?

"Of course I knew that your view was the only correct one," replied Count Rexelaer coldly. "But from charity—pure charity—I declined to enforce it. Had the Baron seen fit to show that reserve which I had a right to expect from a gentleman, instead of assuming from the first an attitude which I may well call aggressive——" He paused and looked at Strum.

"Just so," said the Notary in sullen obedience, cracking his huge finger-joints.

"Just so," repeated his Excellency. "He has developed among the villagers the spirit of faction; he has openly opposed me on every occasion. I have borne it all in a magnanimous spirit, for I cannot bear striking a man when he's down. But at last our position has become quite untenable. One of us must go. Write him a letter to say that the money will no longer be paid."

Strum drew himself up eagerly, with one of his uncouth jerks; his speckled face was bright with exultation. "I could write it here," he said, "and let your Excellency see it."

"There is no such hurry. But you will find pen and ink on yonder table."

The Notary availed himself of the permission. "I wonder what has done it," he repeated. "Surely not that mass on the anniversary of the death of the Baron's mother which they say he was so angry about."

It was but a straw which had caused Count Rexelaer's long-gathering resentment to brim over. True, the Baron's majority at a re-election had been over a hundred; Father Bulbius, embittered by Veronica's increasing perversity, had taken to preaching distinctly polemical sermons, and such of the country gentry as remained still untouched by the corruption of the Hague had increased, since his Excellency's appointment, in invidious cordiality to his rival. For all these things Count Rexelaer hated — secretly, nervously, deeply, according to his character—Dey-

num, its Baron and its surroundings. Now that he had, not one foot in the stirrup, but both hands on the bridle, he resolved to hit back. O the delightful feeling! Not even life-long cringing can teach the worm not to turn.

Still, he waited for the last little something. It took the shape of a letter from the Baroness Borck of Rollingen to her cousin Elizabeth, containing the information that a wide-spread conviction was obtaining in the neighbourhood, that all difficulties would be ultimately set right by a marriage between Wendela and Reinout. Ridiculous as the idea might be, it had commended itself to the country people as a definite "restitution"; "No need to inquire who first started it," wrote the Baroness of Rollingen. "This is just like their scheming Jesuitical ways"—the lady here thought fit to ignore the engagement to Christina Kops, "a disgusting affair altogether"—"but I should be curious to know, though we shall never do that, in how far your nephew, by his conduct, may have given to the story a semblance of foundation."

It was this last sentence which had set Count Rexelaer thinking, for of course Mevrouw Elizabeth had shown him the letter. He himself had been struck by the appearance of that tall, dark girl the day she came up to the Castle. He believed his son to be a great admirer of the weaker sex; why else these prolonged disappearances from home? Well, he had taken him behind the scenes himself, and was the last man to object to a measure of dissipation.

But Wendela?—that was another matter. Dull as Deynum undoubtedly was, notwithstanding the numer-

ous guests at the Castle, young twenty must be taught to distinguish. That was why fathers were created older than their sons.

The Baron van Rexelaer had been to see Lise and her three sturdy children. The old Squire enjoyed sitting of evenings with Farmer Driest by the kitchen-hearth or on the bench outside the Farmhouse; they were contemporaries and had in common a long life of insignificant little all-important country-experiences. They could talk of these for hours, in the quiet gloaming, over their solemn pipes, while the dear music of the lowing cattle fell soft upon the Farmer's ears from the winter stables or the summer fields.

The Baron would talk on, in leisurely accents, about Deynum, Deynum, Deynum. The farmers and their children and their morals and their cows and their difficulties, and their quarrels, and all their financial ins and outs, and a further infinity of "ands." His whole little universe of Deynum. Driest, on his side, would carry on the conversation with that mixture of deference and independence in which the Dutch peasant excels.

But perhaps the Baron liked playing with the children even better. He was foolishly fond of "babies," and grandchildren of his own he had none. The wee bits of humanity at the Farm adored him. Yes, he had many compensations.

He kept thinking of these during his trudge along the frost-broken lanes. Like many men whose troubles are very real, he loved to look upon the brighter side.

He was far better off than he had any right to be. For his conscience reproached him still.

Some children were trying to slide in the slush. They nudged each other and jerked their caps. For "Mynheer" was the tangible Presence; the other, up at the Castle, could only be an August Name.

Veronica came round from behind the wall of the Parsonage, dragging a basket of peat.

"Good-day, Veronica. How is his Reverence?" said the Baron amiably.

"Poorly," replied Veronica. "He can't stand the draughts of this house."

"Dear me, I am sorry to hear that."—"Ah, I should think so," muttered Veronica—"I wonder whether I could go in to him for a moment?"

"I suppose you may," replied the housekeeper ungraciously. "He won't keep as quiet as I want him to."

"Ah, you let him have quiet?" said the Baron; even the mildest of men like their morsel of malice at times. Baron Rexelaer was perfectly aware that Veronica proclaimed him, whenever she dared, a spoiler of other men's goods. He had turned her meek priest out of house and home; worse than that, he had appropriated the small square of oilcloth she had left in her kitchen, a square bought with her own earnings some twenty years ago. That unconscionable, and unconscious, confiscation of oilcloth formed a grievance still greater than the loss of the whole of the former Parsonage.

The Baron knocked briskly at the living-room door. "I don't want anything," cried Bulbius in

querulous reply. He turned a slow head in his arm-chair by the fire, and pushed back the bowl at his side which had evidently contained some unpalatable form of slop. Veronica had half-a-dozen mildewed health-dicta, which she revered like Gospel-truths. "Starve a cold," was one of them. The Father would sometimes buy biscuits, but these grew terribly stale in their paper bag. And he rejoiced that Veronica had not as yet discovered the bottle in the cupboard, nor the two glasses, which he *never washed*.

"You coddle yourself, Bulbius," said the Baron bluntly. He had barely felt illness himself and could not comprehend it, unless, as in his wife's case, it assumed a visible form.

"I am not robust like your Nobleness," pleaded Bulbius. "You see, I am too stout."

"I do," said the Baron.

"But what is a poor creature to do?"

"Gymnastics," said the Baron.

Father Bulbius spread out his vast body, which looked still more mountainous under his shawl.

"The rope would break," he said helplessly.

"There are other things besides the trapèze. You might try a ten-mile walk. But there; when a man has once made up his mind to die of apoplexy, no one can stop him. He must just have his way."

"But I don't want to die," protested the Father piteously. "Neither of heat in the head, as you now predict, nor of cold in the feet, as Veronica prophesies. There's the postman, Baron. Shall we have him in?" And he rapped his fat forefinger against the window-pane.

Yes, there was a letter for Mynheer the Baron. It was Strum's letter. The old gentleman looked down at it, as it lay in his hand, with a quick presentiment of coming ill. Yet it was eight years now since he had been in the habit of watching for misfortune per post. He opened the envelope leisurely and took out the enclosure. And having read it carefully through, he laid it down on the table.

"God is strong," he said aloud, and nothing else. His voice was unbroken.

Yet its calm, deep passion frightened the priest. "What is it, dear Baron?" he queried anxiously. "Nothing amiss, I hope?"

"Oh no, nothing amiss," replied the Baron van Rexelaer. He talked for a few moments of other things—the weather, the village-school—and then he rose and departed. But his steps trembled under him, as he vainly tried to steady them.

The Lady's Dole, it will be remembered, was a fund which a seventeenth-century Baron van Rexelaer had instituted by settlements assigning the annual interest to "the Spouse of the Lord of the Manor, as long as that Lord of the Manor shall be a van Rexelaer." The words of the deed did not stipulate descent from the donor; the money was to revert to the last lady of Deynum or her heirs. The notary of the place was perpetual trustee.

Immediately on the acquisition of the estate by Count Rexelaer, Strum, his intellect sharpened by hate, had pointed out to that gentleman that henceforth the Countess Margherita alone was entitled to the annual payment of the appanage, she being "the spouse of the

Rexelaer van Deynum." But the Count had repudiated this suggestion with disgust, even after the return of the other had so seriously disconcerted him. Gently, though vainly, the Notary persisted. Times change and opinions work round. One evening his Excellency telegraphed.

The Baron, walking home with Strum's letter in his pocket, refused to believe the incredible. He knew well enough, none better, that there was not a drop of his ancestors' blood in the veins of the Rexelaers van Deynum. "It is mere intimidation for some object of their own," he thought, and, without mentioning the matter to wife or daughter, he, next morning early, sought out the Notary.

The office-door was still closed when he arrived, but as he stood knocking and scraping, it was opened by old Mrs. Strum, who immediately dropped into a succession of curtsies. "Walk in, Mynheer the Baron," she began in awestruck tones, "I hasten to inform my son. It is long since your Nobleness accorded us the honour of a visit." And pushing forward her own easy-chair—the room was manifestly a niggard's—she bustled away to find Nicholas.

"Shew him into the waiting-room," said Nicholas.

"Nicky! The Baron!"

"Shew him in, do you hear? Say I am engaged."

"Nicholas, your father would never have approved of that."

"Why didn't you go with my father, then, if you can't manage without him? Do as I say." And this hater of tyrants, who called Count Rexelaer "the

Pacha," pointed with the tip of his quill to the door.

The old lady turned away with a sigh. "Your Nobleness will be more comfortable here," she said, leading the way. "It is so hot in the sitting-room." The Baron, utterly indifferent, sat down.

Twenty minutes' wait ensued, during which two peasants came in who, seeing their former lord, remained standing. One was an old man. "Sit down, sit down," said the Baron. Strum's clerk bent scribbling by the window, his fingers blue with cold.

At last a bell rang in the inner room. As the clerk put his head through the door, Strum's voice was heard saying: "Mynheer Rexelaer."

"Please to walk in, Mynheer the Baron," said the clerk, standing deferentially aside. A faint flush of colour crept over the old gentleman's wan cheeks.

"Good morning, Mynheer; take a seat," said Strum, and continued his writing for the tenth of a minute. Then he looked up. "Well," he said.

"I have received a letter from you, Strum," said the Baron, "I should wish to know what it means."

"What it says," replied Strum.

"I should like to know what is the object of the threat it contains."

"No other object than the threat itself, which is not a threat, but a notification."

"In other words, I am to understand, that it is your unalterable resolve to substitute the Countess Rexelaer for my wife as recipient of the Lady's Dole?"

"My unalterable resolve. What else can I do? My movements in this matter are dependent on the

Count's generosity. Excuse my saying, Mynheer the Baron, that you have been living all these years upon his bounty."

"I—on his bounty," stammered the Baron.

"Undeniably." Strum cracked his thumbs for pleasure. Yet he could not quite overcome the tendency to lapse into civility. He brought himself to with a jerk.

"A Notary's duty is seldom doubtful," he added, "as my dead father used to say."

"Ah, leave me in peace with your dead father," burst out the Baron, "God grant he rest quiet in his grave!"

Strum passed his great hand through his untidy hair. He looked like a beaten school-boy as he joined his splay feet. "I am very busy this morning," he murmured, "and if there is nothing else——"

"Once more, the money will not be paid next month?" queried the Baron anxiously, despite his efforts at self-control. "It will never be paid again?"

"No, for it cannot be. It is claimed by the owner."

"You know perfectly well that only the testator's own family is meant. You, the descendant of the Notary who drew up the deed."

"The deed does not say so. I have no opportunity of consulting my ancestor."

"It is starvation," groaned the Baron, breaking down for one moment. "What object have you in taking the bread from our mouths?"

A suppressed gleam of triumph played behind the Notary's spectacles. "I am only doing my duty," he

said. "Once before when I was doing my duty, you struck me, Baron Rexelaer."

"I know it," replied the Baron, "I was not sorrier then than now."

Strum got up and faced his former patron. "I also regret it," he said. He opened the door into the waiting-room. "No, Mynheer the Baron," he continued, raising his voice. "I cannot give you that money, because it is not mine to give."

The old gentleman eyed the big lout before him with gentle scorn: "I will not tell my friends," he said in a low voice. "It would ruin you."

The Notary's mottled face twitched nervously and, though his attitude remained the same, yet his whole personality seemed to collapse. "I—I am nowise afraid, Mynheer," he stuttered. "I feel that, whatever my duty——"

"Did you not hear me say I would not tell?" asked the Baron, and he passed out through the well-filled ante-room, under a cross-fire of curious eyes.

Mother Strum stood curtsying at her window. For a moment the wild impulse shook him to claim her help. Then he recognised the hopelessness of such humiliation and smilingly took off his hat.

As he passed the Parsonage, he heard Veronica's voice intoning her only song—lame of rhyme and of reason:

"A fair, a merry maid was I,
With dancing step and laughing eye!"

"She may be back sooner in the old place than she expects," he thought.

Suddenly he found himself in his own sitting-room. "Wherever have you been so early?" asked Wendela. He tried to answer her. To his astonishment he could not. The room was clouding over and twisting round. He reeled forward to steady himself, and fell with a dull thud on the floor.

The Baroness, unable to assist him, shrieked once and then sat still, with trembling lips. Wendela had sprung forward. "It is only a fainting fit," she said. "Only the sudden coming into the heat!" and she strove to restore her father to consciousness. "Oh mon Dieu, mon Dieu!" repeated the Baroness, folding her useless hands. With her the words were no vain ejaculation, but a prayer.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEW SCENES AND OLD FACES.

WHEN the Baron was "fully recovered" from his stroke, even the Baroness noticed the change in him. She herself, poor lady, was now become a constant sufferer, with little to do but to watch the slow ascent of her gout. Her head was growing feeble; she could be utterly broken-down at times, and querulous. And Wendela, the headstrong, the impatient, "born to conquer her fate," sat humbled in this school of suffering. The actual physical sickness commanded and obtained her helpful sympathy. She could speak of it, readily, for here was no one's fault but God's. "If anyone has blundered," said the sceptical girl, "it must be mother's Saints."

To her father also she was good; almost happy, in his weakness, to show him a tenderness free from reproach. But the Baron rebelled against himself. "Face the enemy!" he repeated, and he tried to do it with his stiffened leg. This seizure was nothing, he said. Had he not had a similar, if slighter, one many years ago on the evening when the Marquis had found him? He was well, for he had no time to be ill.

It was true that he had no time. The three weeks sped on rapidly to the first of March; on that day the

"Dole" fell due. As the hours wore on without bringing the accustomed packet, the Baron, still very partially recovered, grew more and more restless; he shut himself up, foodless, in his room and sat staring at the inevitable end. Yet at night-fall his very desperation roused him. He wrote a hurried note, after lengthy inspection of that part of the newspaper which he had not glanced at for years, and sent Gustave to the post with it. The old servant shook his head over the superscription. And the Baron lay awake all night, alternately building up dreams of daily bread (no longer of prosperity) and debating with himself whether he should not telegraph a recall at dawn. Why should he? Failure could not make matters much worse, and success was become a necessity.

He trusted to his wife's now almost ceaseless orisons and bead-countings, although these were never for temporal salvation. The Baroness, stiffening in her chair, in a little alcove of crucifixes, images, and invocations, was rapidly becoming "dévotée," dead already, but for her physical pains and her still active charity, a white, worn shadow. She would ask for her poor to come and see her—hers by the mastery of hearts; she knew them well: the respectable, the disreputable, the professional, the needy that are ashamed, and she sent Wendela among them with creature comforts; the spiritual fared but ill at that young lady's hands. Once the daughter, after long impatience, interrupted her mother's monotonous mumbling. "Are *you* happy, Mamma?" she asked abruptly. "No," whispered the Baroness, her pale eyes uplifted, as ever, to the solemn dying Christ. The girl went up to her room and threw

herself down in a passion of weeping, her eyes averted, long after, in dull, rebellious thought, from that great Sufferer who had watched her slumbers ever since she was a cradled babe.

She rose at last to get her father his beaten-up egg. Wendela Rexelaer was a thoroughly incompetent house-keeper, and naturally hated both her incompetency and its object. She stopped to inquire at the Baron's door, almost hoping that he would refuse; the mess was such a weariness to make. "Oh no, I don't want it," called the Baron's feeble voice. She went into the kitchen and dutifully prepared it. And he swallowed it without complaint.

In a few days the Baron knew the worst. The last few thousand florins of his wife's small fortune had been swept away. He looked up from the letter at Gustave, who had brought it and who, in his tutored indiscretion, was lingering with averted eyes over a distant rearrangement of chairs.

"Gustave," said the Baron, "come here. Ten years ago you told me you were a rich man. Are you still?"

"Richer, Mynheer," replied Gustave promptly. "I can't leave off; for nobody can. It's like sliding down a hill-side into the valley of perdition. I'm winning your Nobleness's money still."

"I give you my word I had not speculated all these years," said the Baron hastily. "But you're right. It's gone. We are penniless. And"—his eyelids trembled; he stammered painfully—"I want you to lend me a little money—*now*."

For only reply the servant ran to the door. "Listen

Let me explain!" cried the Baron after him, desirous to tell about the Lady's Dole.

"Just one moment while I fetch it, sir," said Gustave, on the threshold.

"God forgive me," cried the Baron. "There are good men yet!" and his voice failed him. Gustave, meanwhile, who knew all about the Lady's Dole, had evidently made up his mind that the whole of his little fortune would just do to replace it. But he would not have presumed a second time to offer any suggestions thereanent.

"I only want a little at first, a very little," said the Baron presently, "just at first. When I get stronger I can do something, I dare say, and the Freule has a very fine voice. I should prefer to go to a large city. Your sister in Amsterdam who takes lodgers, perhaps we might go to her?"

The servant had the delicacy to keep back the rush of imploring protest which rose to his lips. "Amsterdam will be brighter for your Nobleness than Deynum," he said, "and for the Freule also. My sister will be proud. And you can always return later on."

"Never," replied the Baron. "Not even to be buried here!" And he broke down utterly and buried his face in his hands.

After a moment of hesitation Gustave slipped away without leave. "I wonder whether I did right," he debated with himself in the hall. "It looked almost more like a liberty to stay."

On the evening of their departure the Baron handed

over to Gustave a correct I.O.U. for a fraction of the latter's savings, promising, with restless reiteration, punctually to repay. The valet carefully buttoned up the precious paper in his pocket-book, and subsequently, emboldened by a couple of parting glasses at Job Hennik's, he as cautiously tore it up, lest his heirs should at any time discover and enforce it.

So the family arrived in Amsterdam on a windy March night, and drove to Juffrouw Donders's lodging-house. This house stands—or stood—on a narrow canal in one of the humbler, middle-class parts of the city; the frowning houses look very forbidding; on both sides the stagnant water froths with garbage and weeds. But Wendela could see nothing of this, as she found herself blown, amid a whirl of sleet and general rawness, into a low, white-tiled passage, illumined by a far-away paraffin-lamp. The others were still busy with the Baroness; stout Juffrouw Donders came rolling forward and immediately overflowed. She was all abundance and redundancy, all double-chin and shaking jaw. You fled away with the impression that there was too much of her, bodily, mentally, and especially orally. But, once out of reach of her shapeless good-nature, you looked back with regret.

“And this is the Freule van Rexelaer!” she began, with perceptible promise of very much more. “Oh, Freule, I seem to have known you from a child, so much have I heard of you, and your dear honoured parents! Everyone in this household knows everything about them! It will not be like coming among strangers to find yourselves in our midst!”

"They are bringing in my mother," said Wendela. "We should like to go to our own rooms at once, if you please."

"And so you shall, my dear Freule," replied the landlady with prominent sympathy, lumbering slowly to the front-door, meanwhile. She was not to be cheated of her welcome to the Baroness. She knew what was due to gentlefolks, as well as Gustave did.

Fortunately for the family from Deynum, she stood greatly in awe of her brother, who had often afforded her substantial support. During the first few days of their stay among these uncongenial surroundings, the old servant stood on guard 'twixt his masters and the world, warding off Juffrouw Donders's exuberant kindness. The Baron seemed not ill-content. "This time, thank Heaven, there are no debts," he said. "And here I trust we shall live and die in peace."

Wendela looked away in silence. The house was dark, with the darkness of a great city's evil heart. It was stuffy. If you lifted the sash, the smell from the canal came streaming in. "A healthful smell," said Juffrouw Donders. "Just see what it has made of me!" Gustave having departed to look after the sale of the furniture, the good woman fell on Wendela, like a feather-bed, with endless laudation of her brother and disparagement of her departed husband. The birth of the one and the death of the other she considered the two chief blessings of her life. She had had a hard time of it, with many mouths to fill. "Yet my own was never empty," she said, with a pat on her portly frame, "though God knows I filled it last."

"Life is hideous," said Wendela more resolutely

than ever, and she buried herself in the glorious past. She would draw her chair beside her mother's and ask for the tales she had heard as a child. "Wanda, Wanda," the Baroness murmured in gentle reproof, "Heaven alone is steadfast. The pomps and vanities fade away." "I know that," said Wendela bitterly.

Yet the lodging-house was not all noisy loneliness to the country-girl. A day or two after her arrival, as she was coming downstairs earlier than usual, she met a young man who shrank aside with unwilling mien. The light from a little dusty window fell full upon his face; his eyes were irresistibly drawn towards hers, and as his blush deepened to the old familiar apple-red, she recognised him. "Piet!" cried impetuous Wanda. Then she stammered: "I beg your pardon. I thought you were someone else," and stuck fast.

"I *am* Piet," said the young man. "I am glad you recognised me, Freule."

She leant up against the banisters, and it amused him to see how little changed her manner was. "How-ever came you here?" she said. "I shall want you to tell me all about it."

There was not very much to tell. Having made his way to the capital, with the intention of "going to sea," he had met with good people who had kept him as their errand-boy. One day he had run up against Gustave, who was living with Juffrouw Donders, during the Baron's absence at Cleves, and Gustave had procured him a garret in the lodging-house. "And here I have been ever since," concluded Piet, "and wasn't it good of him to look after me, Freule?"

"But why didn't he tell us?" questioned Wendela, bewildered. "And oh, your mother, Piet!"

"Mother knows I'm doing well. She don't know any more. I can't help it," Piet went on doggedly. "Mynheer Gustave agreed with me. It's all father's fault. You know all about father, Freule."

"Yes, I know," said Wendela gravely. "But I thought that we all should be subject to our parents." She greatly admired herself for the propriety of this sentiment. She also admired herself for the faithfulness with which she practised it.

He looked grieved but not convinced. "I'm doing well," he said in self-defence. "Better than I should have done at home, though I've not made the fortune I had hoped to make. I am clerk to a solicitor, Freule."

She said she was very glad to hear it. He must come and see her father. And she continued her way, confused by the strangeness of this meeting. "He is just like a hundred other clerks," she told herself, but in her heart she thought this handsome, well-grown youth as superior to other clerks as her boy-lover had been superior to other peasant-boys. "He is just Piet," she said.

"A solicitor," said the Baron anxiously, "is the very person I am most desirous to meet, but one fights shy of them, especially after knowing Strum."

Piet Poster appeared before the Baron and Baroness. His manner was that of a page in the presence of his lieges.

"And what is the name of your solicitor, Piet?"

"Mynheer Spangenberg, landheer. Everybody says he's amazingly clever."

"So much the better. And where does he live?"

"He has his office on the Prinsengracht, landheer."

"I want you to ask him when he can receive me." Wendela looked up in protest. "Yes, my dear, yes; I can go in a cab."

"O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world," repeated the Baroness with her back to the others.

"There's only one thing, landheer," began Piet, awkwardly fingering his pot-hat. "Master's a very great radical. One of the extreme Left, he calls it."

"Ah," said the Baron. Then he added, after a thoughtful pause, "I dare say there are honest men among them."

"And you, are you of the extreme Left?" asked Wendela, with laughing eyes.

"I am a clerk, Freule," he replied quickly.

"Hush, Wendela. Please, if possible, make an early appointment for me with your employer, Piet."

Wendela followed the young man into the passage. "You must no longer call my father 'landheer,'" she said.

"Oh but, Freule, I can hardly help it."

"You must help it. The landheer out yonder, forsooth, is Count Rexelaer!" She stamped her foot and then, ashamed of this ebullition, retreated hastily to the sitting-room. Juffrouw Donders's voice was heard downstairs, soundly rating the maid of all work.

CHAPTER XX.

LITTLE PARADISE.

"ANOTHER poem from Volkert," said Spangenberg, advocate and editor, tentatively dangling the manuscript in question over the editorial waste-paper basket.

"And who is Volkert?" asked the editor's companion, an untidy old man with a peaked beard, like a goat's.

"Your question proves what no longer wanted proving," replied Piet Poster's master, laughing, "namely, that you poets recognize no contemporary colleagues. This Volkert is a mysterious young gentleman at the Hague, of perfect manners—he has been here once or twice—and evidently of gentle birth. He is also a Priest and Prophet of the People, but then all the great poets are that nowadays."

"I take no interest in the lower classes, and you know it," replied the other, leisurely warming his knees. "Odi profanum vulgus, et arceo."

"I forgot," said the young editor carelessly. "Volkert does, a poetical one. He signs his contributions to my 'Cry of the People' with a single enigmatical P. By-the-bye, that might stand for 'Profanus.' Now what shall I do with his latest? The basket or the bays? Surely an editor's responsibility is unique under heaven!"

"Let me judge it," proposed the untidy man, sententiously, and he took up the paper. In a very short time he laid it down again. "Nicht einem jeden ward des Sängers Kunst gegeben," he said.

Spangenberg's honest face twitched with sudden resentment. "I shall put it in," he declared coolly.

The poet rose, majestically gathering his dressing-gown about him. "You should not have asked my opinion, Christian!" he said with superb unreason, and stalked towards the door.

"No, but, look here, Mynheer Morèl!" cried the good-natured editor. "This is really fine; just listen! One would like its author to proclaim it in the 'salons' of the Hague!" But the other was gone.

The office of "The Cry of the People" was situated at that time in a little court just off the public thoroughfare. Since then it has been removed to more commodious quarters, but Spangenberg is still editor of the paper, Spangenberg the Socialist. Yes, he is a clever man, unfortunately. But Piet Poster was mistaken in vaunting the extent of his law-practice. People who employ lawyers possess property, and only a poor man makes money out of an "ism."

The name of the court was "Little Paradise." Hyperbolic that name may have been, but we know so little of Paradise. It is long since our ancestors lived there, and families which have "known better days" are too apt to exaggerate. Present Paradises go by comparison. The street was very narrow, very noisy, very dirty, and redolent of all the vegetable produce of Jewry, "given away," from slow hand-carts to thank-

lessly haggling Gentiles by hook-nosed, rag-bedecked benefactors. All day long the street was a babel of cucumbers and oranges. You were glad to escape from that bawling, brawling crowd, through a neat brick archway with a cheerfully grinning Death's head over it, into a little square of houses round a grass-plot and a central bed of roses. Mevrouw Morèl had begged the roses from Juffrouw Spangenberg.

The whole place belonged to Christian Spangenberg's parents, who lived in the substantial house alongside the archway; in fact, they had turned their unprofitable garden into an Eden of rent-producing bricks. Their back-windows looked out on the cottage-like buildings, which were low, like the rents, so that Heaven appeared nearer in the trim little court than in the tall, loud street, outside. The distant, deadened yell of "Cheap! Dirt cheap!" only beautified the silence, and Mrs. Spangenberg would let the children play upon the grass-plot, when Spangenberg was out. And children, romping on a grass-plot, will laugh and shout, even in the Jew-quarter of Amsterdam.

Mevrouw Morèl "thanked her Maker" for bringing her here. But, then, she was a thankful soul. She "thanked her Maker" constantly, and also "her stars," and "goodness," and even "herself," so there may not have been much in the gratitude she scattered so freely. She knew well enough what she meant when she thanked Mrs. Spangenberg. She meant eggs for the ailing, cakes for the diligent, kindness for all. There were nine Morèls, including parents, in one of the cottages, whom Spangenberg would never have accepted as tenants—only think of the woodwork!—but

for Mrs. Spangenberg's broad admiration of the "dear little golden-haired, pale little dears."

Not that Spangenberg was by any means a hard-hearted man. He was a contractor; I do not know what he contracted in the course of his money-making except a gruff manner, but it certainly was not his heart. He made money, and his wife liked that, and they enjoyed it together in a solid, substantial, middle-class way; they had been poor together once. They sent their clever only son, who was always "wanting to know," to the Grammar School and then to the University, but when even this latter Babylonian Tower of Learning (as vast and as confused) still failed to supply young Christian's need, they began to fear that he wanted to know too much. There had been a daughter, much older than the late-born darling, who had married "against them," as they called it, and, sailing to the Indies with her husband, had dropped out of their lives. Henceforward Mrs. Spangenberg had a fretful dread of "thwarting," which maintained itself even when Christian (æ. 20) began to rant about the Rights of Man! "Don't put his back up, John," she constantly pleaded. "If we'd let Jacoba see more of her Arthur, perhaps she'd have found out what a duffer he was." The father unwillingly acquiesced, partly because of a manner young Hopeful had of throwing back his head as soon as the "thwarting" began. The worst blow befell the old man when his go-ahead son deliberately plunged into the sea of social miseries and thence sent up his "Cry of the People." The young advocate called himself a socialist, because with that party alone he found sympathy, political, with suffering.

In reality he was one of the few whose pulses beat quicker when they hear of injustice—to others. His gorge rose against incompetent nepotism and pampered monopoly, against the sweating of women and the torture of children, things we all disapprove of theoretically, in our slippers, by the fire. But Christian Spangenberg was an incipient Dutch Kingsley, with the poetry left out. He started a people's Mission and Social Club in the wretched quarter near his own respectable home. Furthermore he edited "The Cry of the People," thereby stamping himself a "Socialist" at once.

And his unfortunate father possessed money in the funds. The mother—desperate with the horror of a childless old age—flung her love between these combative elements and effected an armistice. Christian was to remain in the house and continue his law business. But his socialism must be banished to one of the cottages in Paradise Court, there to be left under lock and key when he rose to go home. The Cry of the People was never heard within Spangenberg Senior's doors. All the relations and connections, hard-working, hard-fisted burghers, looked on Christian as crazy. The chamber-cloaked father sat over his strong-box of evenings in property-laden snugness; the eagle-faced son trod the boards of his Office at the back, denouncing the "gilded obesity of the bourgeois." And when they met at supper, sincerely affectionate, they got on very well.

It was Mevrouw Morèl's birthday, the greatest event of the year in Little Paradise, far greater even than Juffrouw Spangenberg's. For, if this latter good- and

heavy-natured body was the Lady of the Garden, bright, clever little Mrs. Morèl was its Guardian Angel.

In the morning—"at dawn of day," said the poet—the seven children, six of whom had spent the night packed, like sardines, in boxes, gathered outside their parents' bedroom, the baby having been fetched out previously, to complete the surprise, while mother pretended to be asleep. And a surprise it was—as it had been for the last half-a-dozen years—when the whole lot of them, led by the baby, struck up an Ode to the Day. She came hurrying out and stood in the doorway, smiling upon them with the comeliest of faces, in her night-cap and woollen shawl, this mother of seven and an eighth baby coming, and she kissed them all round, on both cheeks, when the song was completed, and then had to kiss them again, because she had surreptitiously given Peterkin, the lame one, an extra hug and the others had seen it. Only her husband hung back, just a little ashamed. "It wasn't my own," he said with some hesitation; "I had not time to complete it. Next year, if I am spared, they shall sing you my own."

"I know, dearest," she said, "I recognised it. It was Pottema's. Yes, next year, please God; and then it will be the finest ode that ever poet sang."

"Do you think so?" he questioned dubiously. "I tore up what I had done. Pottema's poetry has faults, but, on the whole, it is not undeserving."

She sighed a little passing sigh. Lina, fifteen and her mother's right hand, had been a little toddling thing when Homérus had first spoken of that ode to

his wife. "She will not be able to repeat it, dear," the mother had said. . . .

But the poem was not yet ready; none of Homérus's poems ever were. "Not for want of the power," said his wife, and perhaps she was right. Homérus Morèl was a seer of visions and a dreamer of beautiful dreams, his vast brow bursting with ideas, all in motion for an exit, like gases, a man full of thought, and yet often incapable of thinking. His father, an indolent scholar and gentleman, had given him a luxurious education, while spending the boy's small inherited fortune; in those days Homérus had only been Hendrik, the change was a late inspiration of his own. He believed himself the one supreme poet of his epoch, but he suffered from terrible spasms of doubt. With an artist's perception of the greatness beyond him, he would suddenly tear up whatever he had written, and sob out his weakness on the breast of his faithful spouse. And that lady would comfort him and send him for a walk in the Court. Once there, he could trudge round the grass plot for hours, his lank body drooping forward beneath his knotted hands, his balloon-shaped head up-lifted, with its pointed nose and beard. "There goes the poet," said some busy neighbour, at her lattice, "then, it can't be twelve o'clock."

For punctually at noon Mevrouw Morèl would call: "Homérus, come to dinner!" She never bade him come and hold the baby, even when her own three hands were more than full.

She must have had at least three hands, for she looked after all the children, including this year's and

last year's baby, and she even found time to have a girl-help and look after her. Moreover, she looked after her husband and kept him as comfortable, though she could not keep him as tidy, as the rest. Incidentally she also supported the family, while the poetry was getting ready which was one day to enrich it. The whole lot of them believed in this beautiful consummation, even the smallest, who, having no inkling what poetry was, were certainly least to blame. Father was their gold-mine; some day he would be famous, and then there would always be plenty to eat. They nudged each other, at their play, suddenly hushed by the sight of the poet at his desk. "What is riches, mother? Only money?" little Homer, his father's namesake, had asked one day. The parents looked at each other, struck to the soul. Mevrouw Morèl had been down-hearted that morning, and had grumbled somewhat. She kissed both Homers for only reply.

The mother supported her family by writing children's gift-books to order, the order mostly including the moral of the tale: "To illustrate the evils of greediness, about 15,000 words. Little girl must have curly hair, and greengage jam must be medium of punishment, as per picture. Ready by 15th of next month." It was easy, and not unprofitable, if only you wrote two stories a month.

The little woman's deepest depth of soul, however, was not centred in her tale-concocting nor even in her housekeeping; those leisure moments which she had in common with all intensely busy people she devoted to the composition of a many-volumed work on "The

Social Position of the Child in the Development of European Civilisation." For she had been great since her childhood in the science of sociology, of which her father had been professor and she his favourite pupil. *Her* book will be finished some day, you may be sure. "Scientific works do not sell," she would say to her husband. "Not like poetry, first-rate poetry, of course. Not as yours will." She apologised for her hobby. Other luxuries she had none.

"Good morning, Mother; many happy returns of the day," said young Spangenberg, looking in on Mevrouw Morèl. "I couldn't come sooner, been detained by law-business on the Prinsengracht."

"You mustn't call me 'mother' any more, Christian, as I told you last birthday. I am getting too old to be pleased with a grown-up son."

"You old!" the young advocate laughed merrily. "Your youth is as perennial as the Child's of which you write. What says baby? Grandma?"

She joined in his laugh, as she bustled about among her dinner-things.

"I wanted to ask," Christian Spangenberg went on, "would you let me bring Volkert this evening?—I have spoken of him recently—you remember—the poet?"

"Oh, you may bring him of course. But is he one of your Socialists, Christian? Because, you know, I do not believe in your Socialists."

"Nor I in sociology, Mevrouw, you remember. Goodbye, then, and thanks, till to-night."

"That boy does too much," remarked Mevrouw Morèl, hurrying from the table to the oven.

"A man cannot do too much," said the poet, from his arm-chair by the fire.

"But he can do too many things at a time," protested the housewife, who mostly did three.

"True; he should give his whole mind to one," responded Homérus, "would he excel."

CHAPTER XXI.

VOLKERT.

SPANGENBERG rushed on to his office — his editorial office. "Anyone been, Wonnema?" he asked of the single clerk.

"Only a man with some copy. Mynheer Volkert's upstairs." The clerk, a meagre-looking individual with everlastingly hungry eyes, handed a packet across to his "chief."

"All right. You can go and have dinner." Spangenberg ran up to his den. "Hallo," he cried on entering. "Glad you managed to come. Doing nothing, as usual?"

"I was thinking," replied the individual thus addressed, without altering his lazy position by the stove.

"That need not have prevented your keeping up the fire. Or supposing you had looked through this stupid pile of newspapers—but that was expecting too much."

"True," said the other. "Don't bully me. You know I've no head for practical politics."

"Practical politics unfortunately have but little to do with the 'Cry,'" muttered the young editor, pausing, with a very satirical grin, by his over-loaded desk.

"But look here," began Volkert suddenly, "I really

had something to occupy me. I found this on coming in." He flung across a paper to his friend.

It contained these few words in a firm feminine hand:

"Your poem last week was noble and true. Go on; you are doing a great work."

Spangenberg turned the paper round, then he looked hesitatingly into Volkert's handsome expectant face, and burst into a shout of laughter.

"Of course she is young!" he cried, "and very beautiful! I don't wonder you are charmed."

"I don't care about that," replied the poet earnestly. "I have touched a human heart."

"Can you pardon me, if I inquire what particular verses the lady is alluding to? She has taken her time about writing, and I grieve to say I forget."

"It's the one called 'Noble Nobles,'" replied Volkert, sullenly staring at the neglected stove. "You remember, the one beginning:

" 'They are not noble who but bear the name,
While deeds and words a bastard's birth proclaim.
But they whose heart and intellect have fed
Upon the truths for which their fathers bled.' "

"Quite so," said Spangenberg. "And do you know exactly what it means?"

"Why did you insert it?" asked the poet with spirit.

But Christian, his eyes upon the letter, musingly repeated Volkert's first two lines. "I have it," he said slowly. "Some poor little shop girl or sempstress, ruined by a sprig of the aristocracy, 'whose words and deeds a bastard birth proclaim.' *Now* she finds out he won't marry her. Poor little creature; I wish I

could help." He got up and came and stood in front of Volkert: "Yes," he said, "you have beautiful thoughts. It is very nice and pretty to have beautiful thoughts."

"It's not that," replied Volkert. "Here is a human creature whose heart I've touched. It's a wonderful experience. I have touched some grateful stranger's heart. I never felt anything like it before."

"It *is* grand," said Christian, solemnized by the other's evident emotion, "to know that one man can help another by something else besides a copper tossed in the dirt. Did you never feel that before? Gifted, graceful, graceless sleeper, you feel it—do you?—at last?"

The "mysterious young gentleman from the Hague" spread a pair of white hands towards the sooty stove. "I suppose I had not your opportunities," he replied, a little moodily.

"The more you feel it the better," cried his youthful Mentor, unheeding. "I wish I could trample the feeling deep down into your heart. Don't mind me or the mistakes I am making. Go down on your knees to whatever God you believe in and vow, at this crisis of your soul's existence, never to let the new feeling slip away. Give yourself in the future, not your money only, not only your beautiful thoughts. Give your position which I believe to be high; give your talents which I know to be great. There are so few of us who think as you do. Give yourself in the fight against oppression and injustice, against ignorance and crime."

"I will," cried the other. "I have always wanted to; it sounds so beautiful. But I am waiting for my opportunity; some day it will come!"

"Look through these newspapers then," replied Christian, pushing forward a pile; "mark all passages alluding to the trial of the boy Smits for insulting the Minister of Justice. Poor little fellow! they had imprisoned his father for speaking the truth. There; that will do for to-day. To-morrow will take care of itself." The poet pulled a face, but he drew up his chair to the table and began doing as he was bid.

Presently Spangenberg looked up from his own work: "For doing only is the true believing," he quoted. "Somebody says that; I forget who."

"Why, it's in one of my sonnets," said Volkert. "You know it is."

"On my honour, I did not. Oh you poets, you poets!"

In the evening the two men met again at Spangenberg's law-office, on their way to the Moréls'. "I must just look in at the 'Club,'" said Christian, as they emerged into the street.

The "Club," then the first of its kind, would be considered a poor affair now-a-days. It stood in a back street of one of the humblest parts of the city; the double parlour downstairs being occupied by workmen smoking and drinking beer over their newspapers or chess-boards; while in one of the upstairs rooms a reading-class was going on for street-arabs over twelve. Everybody knew Christian, the founder of the whole concern, and several men expressed regret that to-night's weekly lecture had been postponed. The subject was announced: "Why and how must we reach the

North Pole?" Last week's had been "The Follies of the Paris Commune."

Piet Poster was the teacher of the upstairs boys, a disciplinarian sturdily jolly and strong. As the young men entered his class-room, a dirty ragamuffin came slouching in behind them; the poet drew hastily aside. "Coffee," called out Poster, "go downstairs again immediately. You know you mayn't come up till you're washed."

The boy hesitated. Spangenberg turned quickly: "My dear Volkert," he said, it's late already, and I must be busy a few minutes with Poster. Take this urchin downstairs—there's a good fellow!—and wash him."

The couple departed—it would have been too silly to refuse. As they wound down the narrow staircase, Volkert, anxious to cover his embarrassment, commenced conversation.

"Why do they call you 'Coffee'?" he asked.

"Because of what came off when I washed first," said the boy.

They found a pantry in which stood several tubs of tepid water, under a flaring gas-light. "I won't," said the boy, when he saw them, and hung up, dogged and dishevelled, against the whitewashed wall.

The young dandy opposite twirled his cane and felt ashamed of his orange gloves. He resolved to try argument: "Why not?" he said, persuasively.

"'Cos it makes one feel cold," replied Coffee.

"But then you can't go upstairs again. Don't you want to learn to read?"

"Yes, I shall too," said Coffee. He stared intensely.

He was lost in contemplation of the gentleman's gold chain. The Lover of all Mankind grew weaker than water before this refractory brother, but vanity recoiled from an unwashed return to the class-room. "Look here," he said, "I'll give you this silver florin, if you'll clean your face and hands." The effect was instantaneous. "You needn't mention the florin," said Volkert, as they wended their way upstairs again. But at the door he halted, ashamed. "Say what you like," he whispered. A cheer greeted the vanquished Coffee, who stole silently to a seat. "I congratulate you, Mynheer," said Piet in an eager aside to the visitor. "For days I have been regretfully sending that boy away. You manage them better than I." Volkert coloured. "I gave him a florin to do it," he said.

Mevrouw Morèl's frequent evening-parties would have delighted William Wordsworth, for their material pleasures were "plain," and their "thinking" was "high." This occasion of her birthday, however, was always distinguished by mixed company, and drinks. Spangenberg Senior's annual contribution consisted of a bowl of punch, and his wife sent a cake from the confectioner's which the children declared vastly inferior to their mother's home-made.

There was little Miss van Dolder in her grandmother's brooch and a black silk which might also have been her grandmother's. Miss van Dolder represented Hereditary Wealth in Little Paradise, with an income, from somewhere in the funds, of nearly a hundred pounds. She had seriously considered the duty of removing when the "Cry" first arose in the

Court, but she dreaded the possible damage to her grandmother's inlaid cabinet. She professed an inherent distaste for all children and manifested a consistent affection towards the seven little Morèls. And there was Balby, the poor old lodger at the dressmaker's, Homérus's especial protégé, because he devoted whatever remained to him of life to the silent accompaniment of the poet on his interminable walks round the square. Homérus discoursed of all things in heaven or on earth, or beneath the abysses of the sea; if he halted for breath, his companion would remark, with a shake of the head: "It is marvellous indeed" or "It sounds quite incredible," and the poet would complacently proceed. One day he had been telling how a famous contemporary had acknowledged his genius: "And what do you think of that?" he inquired. "It sounds quite incredible," said Balby, meditatively eyeing the pump.

And there were the parent Spangenberg's, upon whose arrival the extra candles were lighted. Miss van Dolder remained anxiously debating with herself whether she had taken offence at this on the previous occasion. Spangenberg, on his part, was considering, for the fiftieth time, if the hostess was entitled to "my dear" the wife of the owner of the property. Fortunately Homérus sat oblivious of these doubts. Was it not "*Mevrouw Morèl*" and "*Juffrouw Spangenberg*"? Only a Dutchwoman can fully fathom that distinction.

Presently Christian put in his head. "Good evening, everybody. Good evening, Miss van Dolder," he said, "how solemn you all look. Might I ask you something, *Mevrouw*?"

She came out to him on the landing. "I was just mixing the punch," she said reproachfully.

"Oh, it can't spoil under your hands. I've got Tipper, the tailor-evangelist I was telling you of. May I bring him up as well as Volkert? He isn't as tiresome as you'd think."

"But what's the use of bringing all these people here, Christian?"

"Oh, I want them to know you. It does them good."

"True," said the little lady thoughtfully. "Anyone might consider it a privilege to listen to Mynheer Morèl."

"Exactly," replied Spangenberg, bounding downstairs.

"But your parents will object," she hissed over the banisters.

"They always do," sang back this graceless product of parental love.

Volkert, immediately on his entrance, held all the ladies' hearts in the hollow of his unconscious hand. In that humble little company he shone unassumingly, like a still, white star, his one unattainable desire to remain unnoticed and give no trouble. Tipper on the other hand, a good young man and first cutter to a tailoring firm, shrank back, fussy from shyness and irregularly assertive on principle. It was his religious belief he asserted, not himself.

The clock ticked slowly, and the respectable company sat in a circle of boredom. Juffrouw Spangenberg praised the eldest daughter, Lina, to her blushful face, causing the damsel's mother to wriggle on her

chair, and the contractor tediously told a lengthy story, which everyone had read the day before in the *Amsterdam Gazette*, about an Emir of Blucherstan (as he called him) who, travelling on a tour of inspection in famine-stricken provinces, had requisitioned provisions from the starving inhabitants and been fed upon roast child under the designation of veal. The little hostess cast terrified glances at the wall behind which five of her own offspring were sleeping; the advocate murmured a "pereant!" over his punch.

"It was one of that family that conquered Napoleon?" suggested the dress-maker's lodger, speaking for the first time.

"Of course, Balby," replied Christian heartily amid the general hesitation. "So I thought," said the lodger, taking snuff.

But it was not till the elder Spangenberg had departed, accompanied by Miss van Dolder (in a flutter of irritable self-reproach for having once more forgotten to rise before the contractor's wife) that the simple enjoyment, such as it was, of the evening began. Half a dozen men drew their chairs round the bright fire and the plenteous punch-bowl, and little Mrs. Morèl sat down to her squeaky piano and played them Chopin. Then Spangenberg sang a couple of songs, and one of these brought a thrilling surprise to the stranger; the words were his own, a lament from the "Cry," set to music, by whom? The tears stood in his big dark eyes. "Magnificent eyes," whispered the little musician to Christian. But Christian was busy proposing her health in terms of abundant laudation and trying to get

Tipper, the teetotaler, to drink it in a glass of the golden fluid. Then a silence fell upon the company that Mynheer Morèl—they all called him "Mynheer"—might have his share of the fun and orate, which he did, warmly and well.

"You young men are mistaken, as I often tell Christian," he was saying to the newcomer, "in striving and straining, for a millennium. History should tell you that a nation's greatness, like an individual's, is absolutely dependent on present suffering and future hope. I trust, I sincerely trust, that the human race will never live contented. Fortunately there is now less chance than ever of that."

"The people——" began Spangenberg.

"Don't interrupt me, Christian. Pah, the folly of your talk. You are shamed by the Greeks or the Jews, who, like you disbelieving in a future life, at least believed, unlike you, in the joys and griefs of the present. Almost I would prefer the patient Man of Sorrows, with his glories of adversity and his 'yet a little while.' At least, experience can never disprove his ideals, as it speedily will yours. And although we may think that he grossly exaggerated the ethical value of suffering——"

The quiet tailor stretched his arm across the table, as if warding off a blow. "I cannot hear my Lord and Master spoken of like that," he said.

Homérus started, uncertain what to do, and turned to Balby to hide his confusion.

"It is truly marvellous," said the lodger, waking up.

"Well, well, I am doing all the talking," continued

Homérus, "which is uncivil"—O sancta simplicitas!—"you young men ought to furnish me with novel ideas. I have often contemplated writing a poem on 'The Coming Creed.' In fact, I have begun one, but the subject is momentous."

"Surely the coming Creed will be Love," ventured Volkert.

"Ah, young man; that is no novel idea. It is the old one which each good man newly starts with. Have you ever heard, you youngsters, of the love which speaks through pain? Love?—what do you, what do I, know of love? Some of us, the best, the highest, are struggling to read, in the blindling sunlight, a few letters of that sacred Name, and to shout them down to the chattering, chaffering masses below. These are the poets, the prophets, on the uppermost rungs of the ladder. One of them, soaring beyond power of eyes to follow, has cried back into our darkness: 'God is Love!' There we may leave it, in the inmost heart of Heaven." He stopped abruptly, and with a hasty, unconscious fervour swept his long hand across the tablecloth.

Spangenberg leaped to his feet. "Erôs! Anikate Erôs!" he cried, "I am not a poet, like Mynheer or like Volkert; I am only a common-place mortal, but my heart sings the pæans my lips are unable to speak. What fitter temple than this to recite the praise of the Prince who holds rule here, a merciful tyrant? Gentlemen, hurrah for Love in this house, where he gilds every day with his presence. Hurrah for a sun that ascends through the years without danger of setting. Gentlemen, I fancy I am talking nonsense. Hurrah for

Mevrouw Morèl, the Queen of Love in her own little kingdom! Hurrah!"

They all shouted and emptied their glasses, and soon after that the little party broke up. Not, however, before Christian had told Volkert about the hostess's wonderful work on the "Social Position of the Child."

"A study in evolution," added Mevrouw Morèl, blushing. "Thank you, Christian; I have reached the Merovingian period. I should progress faster but that I so seldom find time to go to the library for books."

"Couldn't I fetch them for you?" asked Volkert impulsively.

The little lady blushed with pleasure. "Oh, I couldn't really——" she began, but Spangenberg cut her short. "That's right, Volkert," he said. "He's got oceans of time, Mevrouw, and you've nobody else"—a quick glance at the white-headed seer, who was gazing abstractedly into the lamp—"He can come to you about it to-morrow."

The young men took leave. At the door the tailor stopped, irresolute, and then faced round. "There is——" he began, "I—I should just like to say this. You have been kind in asking me here. I—perhaps we shall never meet again. You have been speaking a great deal about human happiness and the King of Love! Oh the King of Love!"—he clasped his hands. "If only you knew him! He leads his servants in paths of perfect peace. He is *my* King. Would to God the Lord Jesus ruled in every heart here present to-night." He had spoken the closing sentences quite fluently. He gave them all a sort of little farewell bow and was gone.

Christian and Volkert followed more slowly, passing in silence across the desolate court. By the Spangenberg's door they halted, under a solitary gas-lamp.

"Mynheer Morèl talks well," said Christian. "He has beautiful thoughts, like you, and he has talked about them all his life."

"And this is what you call a convivial evening?" asked the other young man.

"Yes," replied Christian, latch-key in hand, "this is what I call pleasant intercourse. Would you prefer a ball?"

Volkert went on alone. For a long time Christian's words kept ringing in his ears, but gradually they gave place to the other strange impressions of the evening: Mevrouw Morèl, Mynheer Morèl, that humble home of valiant love and lofty effort. How they loved each other, these two, how they understood each other! This, surely, this unity of love and art was *life*. And was it the poet's fault if poetry doesn't pay?

Then he remembered Tipper and smiled. Yet deep down in his heart lay the tailor's solemn message: "He leads *His* servants in paths of perfect peace."

"Well," he mused, "I shall have to spend the morning in the University Library. After that I must hurry back, for I am due at my aunt's 'At Home.' Christian is right, but he sees only his one side of the question. I made a fool of myself at his 'Club.' A gentleman's duty is to remain a gentleman. Then what right have I to break loose? I accept my dull weight of 'Fortune's favours,' and drag on alone."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE WILL.

"WHO is that?" asked a passer-by, as the brougham with its beautiful grey thorough-breds swept at a sharp angle out of the Noordeinde into the square before the Palace.

"His Excellency Count Rexelaer," replied his companion. "Doubtless on duty. One can see you are a stranger in the Hague."

"Of course I am. And who is Count Rexelaer? One of the Rexelaers of Deynum?"

The other laughed aloud. "And who is King William?" he said. "And who is the Pope? It is something, at least, that you know there are Rexelaers of Deynum."

The "provincial" was nettled. "That is altogether different," he said. "Everyone knows that; it is a matter of history. But as for distinguishing each little mannikin at Court——"

"Hush, hush! you are still in the Hague. Keep those sayings for when you get back to Friesland. He is *the* Rexelaer of Deynum; will that suffice you? And moreover, or perhaps on that account, My Lord the High Seneschal."

"Well, at any rate, he had a nasty, sneaking sort of face," said the Frisian, as they walked on.

Count Rexelaer alighted from his carriage and passed through the great glass doors. The doorkeeper checked him deferentially.

"There is a foreign gentleman waiting to see your Excellency," he said.

Count Rexelaer found the foreigner in his bureau. He was a tall man, correctly dressed and neatly shaven, a man with a settled expression of worry on his smooth, pale face. Count Rexelaer measured him at a glance. One of those persons whom everybody but a gentleman, even a Royal doorkeeper, mistakes for a gentleman. Count Rexelaer was a gentleman and knew.

"My name is Loripont, Excellency," said the stranger politely, in French, "Antoine Loripont, at your Excellency's service. I can hardly flatter myself that your Excellency remembers it."

"No," said the Count, "I do not." After a moment's indecision he waved his hand in the direction of a chair.

Loripont took no notice of this permission. All through the interview he remained standing in a "correct" attitude by his Excellency's writing-table.

"I was valet," he continued, "to the late Monsieur the Marquis de la Jolais-Farjolle de Saint-Leu et de Deynum"—was it deference which prompted this final addition, or rather a desire to annoy?—"I was with Monsieur the Marquis at the time of his death. Shortly after, I wrote to your Excellency."

"Ah, *that* I remember," said the Count. "I replied to your letter by asking for fuller information, which was never received."

"It is so, Monsieur le Comte. Most humbly I hope for your Excellency's pardon. From the tone of the reply I too rashly concluded that further attempts would be useless. And so I gave the matter up."

"If it was 'chantage' you meditated," said the Count frigidly, "as I believed at the time, your efforts were indeed superfluous. They would be so still."

"It was not 'chantage,' Monsieur le Comte, if your Excellency will forgive me. I have no wish to extort money. The Deynum Notary told me, immediately after my lamented master's decease, that the document was valueless. When your Excellency answered me that you were willing to perform whatever the law of the country required of you, I said to myself: I can do no more. The good God must look after his own."

"You showed judgment," said his Excellency, with downcast smile, drumming his polished finger-tips on the table. "Has time rendered you less discreet?"

"Not so, Monsieur le Comte, but time has taught me better. Perhaps the Deynum Notary did not know; perhaps he did not want to know. I have discovered that the document was not absolutely valueless. It is a valid will and testament."

Count Rexelaer looked up with an oath. "That is a lie," he said shrilly. "An infamous, blackguardly, black-mailing lie. Not a penny shall you get." Then his gaze sank slowly down again, upon his polished finger-tips.

"I must beg of your Excellency not to swear at me," said Antoine; "it awakens too painful recollections. I was about to remark that, in my country, the will was

perfectly valid. I am speaking the truth. It would have been valid, even had there been no witnesses."

"It was not binding in Holland," said the Count, "and that is enough."

"The paper," continued Antoine, without heeding the interruption, "cancelled the Dutch will the Notary had just drawn up, and directed that the entire estate of Deynum and the sum of two hundred thousand francs should pass to the Convent of Crévort, to the little sisters of the poor, to be spent exclusively in charity. Madame the Countess, your lady, was again completely disinherited."

"Had this 'paper' been of any value, you would have turned up eight years ago," said the Count.

"Three years after the decease of Monsieur le Marquis I learned, from a Belgian lawyer, exactly what its value was. We could not have touched your Castle, Monsieur, which—luckily for you—lies in Holland, but the Belgian money should never have been paid. That was a mistake."

"Mistakes are often difficult to remedy," said the Count with a smile.

"Surely that depends upon who was erroneously benefited by them?" suggested Loricont, who had always been perfectly at ease in the extremes of servility and insolence. "Your Excellency has received from Belgium two hundred thousand francs to which you had not even a legal claim. Had I shown my little paper sooner, you would never have received them."

"Are you come to ask them back?" asked the Count.

"As for that, I am come to ask everything back."

His Excellency cast a quick glance at the bell-rope.

"There can be no doubt that your Excellency is not entitled to Deynum. My master left his property to the Church. I am only a valet. I ask you, a Christian and a nobleman: Have you a right to retain it?"

"The property," replied the Count, "is both naturally and legally mine. Allow me to say that my time is much occupied. The Marquis, just before his violent death, cannot have been responsible for his actions, and that paper, if it be genuine, represents a crazy whim. Good morning."

Loripont did not stir from his respectful pose. "As for whims," he replied boldly, "the first will was no less a whim than the second. But I hardly dared to expect that your Excellency would give back the estate. With the money, however, it is a different matter. That was paid in legal error. I am told it cannot be legally redemanded. I am not a judge of such matters. To me your law, which sets aside a dead man's wish, seems monstrous."

The Count veered round in his chair, politely contemplative. "On the contrary, my good man," he said. "Allow me to explain. The Dutch law is exceedingly judicious in requiring the assistance of a Notary. Were the rule generally introduced, a contested succession would become an exceeding rarity. In this country such cases are almost unknown."

"I understand nothing of these matters, your Excellency. But one thing I know. That money is not yours. It belongs to God."

"Is that why *you* come and ask for it?"

"Monsieur le Comte, I do not ask a penny for myself. I can no longer bear the idea that the owners have been defrauded through my negligence. That idea haunts me night and day."

"Nevertheless, I am unable to employ you as a go-between in paying my dues to the Almighty. That is final."

The Count blinked irritably and pushed about his writing-things.

"Monsieur le Comte," Antoine laid one hand on the table, "it is the religion—can you not understand? You know how my master died; I have kept my oath to him, and Brussels does not. For pardon he gave it all in that desperate moment,—to buy pardon for his crime. And now it is useless, and a curse must rest upon it, while, perhaps, he endures the pains of purgatory. Do you dare to leave him *there?*"

Once more Count van Rexelaer smiled. "My friend," he said, "you are melodramatic. You can hardly expect me to purchase a release for all my relations whom their own misbehaviour may have landed in hell. But these are superstitious ideas, the outcome of a corrupt religion. With us Protestants Hell or Heaven is a question of grace, not of gold. There; of course you cannot understand. To come down to business: How much do you want? You were long my uncle's valet and, once in a way, I do not mind assist-

ing you with a couple of hundred francs, but, take notice, you mustn't come again."

"My God, it is hopeless!" exclaimed Antoine, and fell back with a lurch, and stood silent.

"Yes, my offer is conclusive. It's no use trying these things on with me, my man,"—the Count held out a banknote—"Here, thank me, and get you gone."

"Listen, you!" the quondam valet bent forward eagerly. "I used not to care so much about being quite sure. But as a man gets nearer the end, he wants to doubt on the right side. When your wife's uncle killed himself (and I hadn't grown rich in his service), I paid money to have masses said."

"That was very wrong," interrupted the Count. "It is a foolish, futile superstition."

"Listen, please. From this paper"—he tapped his breast—"I knew the suicide had hoped to spend his thousands where I could but give hundreds. I could not help that. Three years later I learned, that I *could* have helped it. O my God, what a thought! It was my fault, then, that the money had not been paid! I have a small business; my wife is frugal and it prospers, but every penny I can scrape or save I bring to the priests in payment of my debt. My wife does not comprehend and our ménage is disunited. I shall never pay it off. I shall die before it is done. I also have a complaint"—he clutched at his chest; his words came hoarse and fast—"I am dying. I *dare* not die with that unpaid debt. I dare not meet the dead man,

beyond, perhaps, in those flames in which my fault has chained him. Voyons, Monsieur le Comte,—you are a mighty Noble—even you, you do not *know*.”

An awe-struck silence sank upon the little room. The sick man stood panting, his eyes fixed, in eager doubt, on the other's face. The Court Favourite was calming his fretful nerves. At last he spoke, smoothly enough: “Your religious ideas are all wrong, my good man,” he said. “I wish I could get you to speak to one of our pastors, for I see you are in earnest. You are the victim of a system which trades upon human credulity. Were the sum but a trifle, my scruples would forbid me to squander it on priests.”

“I have refunded forty,” said Antoine doggedly. “It has taken all these years. And a hundred and sixty remain.”

“So you say. But this wonderful will, I have not even seen it!”

A flash of hope played across the suppliant's face, as he softly inquired: “Is your Excellency near-sighted?”

“No. Why do you ask?” But the Count knew why, and even he winced under this menial's measureless contempt.

Antoine fell back a few paces: “I am not as strong as I used to be,” he said apologetically. Then he drew a paper from his breast and held it aloft with one hand, while the other remained concealed in a bulgy side-pocket, which, the Count felt convinced, contained a revolver.

"It is the Marquis's crest," said Antoine. "If you knew his eccentric hand, you will easily recognise it."

"I cannot read it from here," replied Count Rexelaer indifferently. "Besides, the matter is of no account. You may take your hundred florins——" he got up and rang the bell.

Antoine Loripont put back his paper, buttoned his coat, and folded his arms across his chest. "And now," he said in accents of desperate restraint, "it becomes 'chantage.' I will make you do it. In the organs of the opposition, in the socialist journals, I will publish this valid will, valid but for a fluke. Now, will you listen?"

"In the papers of the opposition, the socialist journals? My good friend, pourquoi pas? I do right in upholding the law of the land. There, admit my incredible good-nature, in a man of my exalted position. Monsieur my departed uncle's would not have held out so long."

Steps were heard in the adjoining anteroom. Antoine Loripont pressed close to the Head of the Household, who involuntarily shrank back. "I will tell," said the man in a clear whisper, "what I know—it is not much, but it is enough—of the wealth of Mademoiselle Cochonnard. Now, Monsieur the Court Dignitary, here in the Royal Palace I ask you again: Will you pay back the money or not?"

For the second time during that interview the Count swore a fierce oath. "D——," he said, "I knew it was black-mailing all along. How much do you want? Will five thousand florins do?"

"All or nothing," answered Loricont, retreating to the door.

The Count started up and came running after him.

"Ten thousand," he hissed out hurriedly. "I can't make it more than ten thousand. Twenty thousand francs. Consider. Nobody would offer more."

Loricont opened the door and left him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND.

AN hour later Count Rexelaer quitted the August Presence renewed and refreshed in all the tissues and fibres of his moral being, as by a bath of sunlight. For we all of us are strengthened by a draught from our Source of Life, physical or psychical, and the Court Functionary left the Court Atmosphere, refilled, re-corked, re-labelled and re-polished, a bottle full of sweetest Essence of Orange-flowers, with a soft little kidskin mask and a ribbon. Not that it wore the ribbon to-day, but it always felt it there.

"I may as well look in on Elizabeth," he said to himself, as another flunkey was helping him on with his coat. "Perhaps Gratia will be there, and that will save me a visit." Gratia was his old, unmarried sister, come to stay for a week with some quiet friend of her own.

He satisfied himself, on entering, that Gratia *was* there, and a great many other people also. Mevrouw Elizabeth, in her hospitable, comfortable life, liked to see her spacious rooms well-filled. Hilarius was an unusual visitor at her receptions; she received him with effusion.

"How is Jane's baby?" he asked, from the tips of his colourless lips. "Accept my congratulations."

"As for congratulations, my dear Hilarius, his abominable father has again cut them down."

"Fathers can't live for ever, not even old Simmans," the Count said lightly. But the words struck back, cold, with a swift reminiscence: "Even your Excellency, who is a great noble, does not *know*."

He glanced across at his own son and successor in spirited conversation with a voluminous somebody in a prominent pink boa, the Russian minister's wife. Then he edged away to his sister, whom he found the centre of an amused little group. "Doubtless, making a fool of herself," he reflected, as he greeted her. "I am sorry we so seldom meet, Hilarius," said the timid lady. "We were wanting to ask you to dinner, but we thought Margherita would hardly care to come?" The Count murmured something about pressing duties, and Reinout also came lounging up, dodging a beautiful woman who was evidently seeking to attract his attention—you remember the Duchess de Vañhas Vermillanas and her recent infatuation for Scriccini, the tenor? Well, twenty years ago, in the full flush of her beauty and her scorn for the Duke, she was deeply in love with Reinout van Rexelaer. His portrait still stands on her toilet-table, amid rouge-pots and essences. She bought it when he became famous.

"Hilarius, I want your subscription, too," said the Freule. "And Reinout's as well,"—she turned to the lady beside her, a Privy Councillor's wife—"it has really done excellent work"—she looked up at her brother. "I am speaking of the Society for furnishing Layettes——"

"Fie," said his Excellency, holding up a playful

finger. There was a general giggle. How witty he was, his Excellency! "What a subject," he continued, "for an unmarried lady!"

"Hilarius!" she looked at him for a moment with her gentle, guileless eyes; then she turned to her nephew: "We only supply, to the poorest of the poor, what is absolutely indispensable; I assure you the work is good."

"I believe it," he said, and her face quite brightened under unaccustomed sympathy. He was written down a member on the spot, though declaring himself unable, to his father's disgust, to produce the humble florin of membership. Half an hour ago he had emptied his purse, with the old, unthinking generosity, into the hands of a woman over-flowing with woe.

His immediate neighbour stood twitting him with his novel duties. "You will have," she said, "to take the baskets round, yourself, and"—she screamed with merriment—"you will have to pin on the—the things!" Plump Rolline, an early matron, drew nearer to enjoy the joke. "Oh, how funny!" she said. "I should love to see the dear little baskets, with the dozens of little caps and chemises all done up with coloured ribbons and frills. I must ask Aunt Gratia to put me down for a florin too."

In another corner of the room George, looking handsomer than ever, was telling a story to an admiring circle of girls, amongst whom sat, in a clumsy, crimson heap, his own especial Miss Kops, the single untitled person in the room. The story, in spite of its silver-gilt wrappings, had dirt at its core. Reinout stood watching for a moment: two of the girls who were

listening belonged to the half-a-dozen from whom he was expected to choose a wife. He flushed scarlet as he turned away.

"Your cousin is evidently a wit," remarked Monsieur de Bonnaventure at his elbow. "When young ladies smile in that unwilling manner, the joke is always to their taste. I regret the more that I cannot speak the language."

"You know languages enough already," replied Reinout with a sneer, "to speak to women in."

The attaché smiled. "What will you have? It is part of the profession, as you will learn soon enough. Have you any idea where they are going to send you? Your father spoke of St. Petersburg. The climate is cold, but not the ladies. At any rate it is never dull."

Reinout, already several paces off, stopped and eyed the Frenchman from head to foot. "You find the Hague dull?" he said slowly.

"I?—forgive me, but yes. Wherewith should I amuse myself?"

Antoinette, who was standing in a corner with the Count, here beckoned to her cousin to join them.

"Fallait endormir le petit," muttered the Frenchman, as he sauntered away to take leave of the lady of the house, with tenderest enquiries after her venerable parent, whose wonderful health formed, in all Dutch society, a subject of amused admiration.

"Come here, Reinout," cried Topsy. "I am trying to get Uncle Hil to admire these verses. They are in the same review as those which Jane read out the other day, and by the same writer. I see that he

signs 'René,' a namesake of yours. They are so good I wish you had written them; but uncle Hil doesn't care a bit."

The Count was looking bored. "Thank Heaven he has not," he said with awakening fervour. "One poet in the family is quite enough. No, Topsy, our future diplomat is certainly not poetical."

"Father, are you going away soon?" asked Reinout, detaining him, "because I should like to accompany you home."

"In a quarter of an hour," replied the Count. "Ta, ta, Antoinette. Don't read too much."

"Reinout," said his cousin, "come out into the conservatory for a minute." She passed into a little glass passage, bright with greenery and azaleas, and there stood silent, gazing down upon the open page. "Blessed are the pure in heart," she said presently. The French poem before her, some five and twenty lines, bore this title: "The Pure in Heart." The words of the close,—but is poetry not untranslatable?—might be inadequately rendered as follows:

* * * * *

Eyes that would soar—Almighty God, Thou knowest—
Unto the whitest secrets of Thy breast,
Must they still sink, from lower depth to lowest,
By their own weight depressed!

Hearts held enchained by weeds and muddy coating,
Shall they not burst their bond,
And rise at last, in Thy pure sunshine floating,
Like lilies on a pond?

"For they shall see God," murmured Antoinette.

She looked up and gave Reinout her hand. Her eyes were full of tears.

"You will not betray me?" he asked, breaking the silence.

"Of course not," she answered. "But why 'betray'? Don't you want, at least, to pluck your laurels?"

"In there?" he asked, pointing to the crowded room from which they had just escaped. There was such a world of misery in his voice that she dropped her eyes again. "My father and I," he added, inconsequentially, "in our own way, we *do* love each other."

A commotion had arisen meanwhile among the gay company inside. Rolline appeared in the framework of the window, filling it with her healthful prosperity. Even at that moment a flicker of amusement played over her perturbed features at sight of the pair in the greenhouse.

"Oh, Topsy, haven't you heard?" she said. "Grand-mamma's had a fit. Isn't it dreadful? She's dead."

Ten minutes later Count Rexelaer and his son, side by side in the silence, were driving rapidly home. They had nearly reached their destination before Reinout began:

"Father, this is what I had wanted to say: Monsieur de Bonnaventure comes to the house too much."

"Surely, Reinout, I am the best judge of the question whom I think fit to receive."

"Father, I only wanted to say this: Monsieur de Bonnaventure comes to our house too much."

"It is an improper thing to say, a ridiculous thing. Oblige me by speaking of something else, or holding your tongue."

"You will remember — will you not? — that I said it?"

"No, I will try to forget."

They did not exchange another word. The carriage stopped. Reinout was nearest the door. He got out first and hurried up the steps. In the entrance-hall he paused and faced his father. A well-known hat and stick lay on an oaken seat. Their glances met and dropped away. The servant who had opened the door stood motionless, at attention, with his eyes fixed on the buckles of his shoes.

CHAPTER XXIV.

HUMILITY AND HUMILIATION.

THE Canal of the Roses, despite its fragrant name, is not a pleasing water whereby to pitch one's tent; the roses smell too strong. Yet when Vrouw Poster sent, as a farewell gift, a great nosegay of "Baroness" blossoms, "What shall we do with these?" said the old lady to her daughter; "take them away."

The Baroness was now completely dependent on Wendela's care. The landlady's advances she repelled with chill hauteur; she would have no sympathy, not even from her daughter. "God withholds all His mercies," she said between her prayers, "even death."

With part of the produce of the Deynum sale the Baron repaid Gustave's loan and at the same time he dismissed him. "I cannot even afford," he said, "to give you the pitiable wages you at present receive."

"Yes, Mynheer the Baron, I understand," said Gustave, standing very straight.

"I shall not insult you by praising your faithful service. I heartily thank you. Give me your hand."

Gustave took his master's worn fingers gently in his own, looked upon them for a thoughtful moment, and then deferentially laid them down.

"Mynheer the Baron," he began, "it has always

been my intention, on leaving your service, to settle down with my sister. I suppose this need make no difference?"

"I would not disturb your plans for the world," said the Baron.

"My sister has a hard struggle to make both ends meet and it is only fair I should assist her?"

"But a rich man like you, Gustave?"

"I beg your Nobleness not to speak of my miserable money, which is really more yours than mine. I would not live on it for the world, and, besides, I should be so dull." He had made a will, in fact, in which he had ventured, with due circumspection, to leave the produce of his speculations to the daughter of the man who had lost where he won.

And so Gustave quitted the Baron's service and waited on his sister's lodgers.

"I must go and see this Mynheer Spangenberg," said the Baron day after day. "I shall be better to-morrow and then I shall go."

Meanwhile some means of subsistence would have to be devised; for hours together the Baron sat revolving this problem in his weary brain. On one point his mind was made up. He would accept of no man's charity.

"You have, in fact—forgive my saying it—been living all these years on Count Rexelaer's bounty." The words burned in his heart. "I must prove them a falsehood before I die," he said, throwing back his grand old head. "I have borne everything and kept silence. I will *not* bear that."

He did not wish to see anybody, but John Borck came. "Papa, here is Mynheer Borck," said Wendela, and, before anyone could object, their former antagonist was in the room. "I wanted to consult you about a horse, Rexelaer," began the lord of Rollingen. "I hope you won't think I intrude, but I happened to be in Amsterdam and I remembered that nobody in all our country-side is as good a judge of a horse as you. I wish you would give me your advice."

"Gladly," said the Baron, much gratified, though not altogether the dupe of the excuse. "I bought a horse here a week ago——" began Baron Borck, and soon his companion was very much interested.

"And now, I wonder whether you would forgive me, if I said a few words about something else?"

A troubled look came over Mynheer Rexelaer's face.

"Of course this business of 'the Dole' is infamous. I cannot understand—excuse me—your acquiescing in what is practically robbery. The money no more belongs to that gin-seller's son than it belongs to me. Yes, don't look at me so; I know what I am saying. Have you any idea why my Lord Count was so anxious to drive you from Deynum? They say he was afraid of your lovely daughter's charms."

The Baron checked the fierce words that came rushing to his lips. "We never met," he said, simply. "I was glad of that, though my wife has always had a foolish softness in her woman's heart for the unknown boy whom they call Reinout Rexelaer. My daughter, if ever she marries, will marry one of her equals, I hope."

"He will be hard to find," said friendly John Borck.

"But, look here, you must recover this money. Frankly, Rexelaer, I want you to authorize me—me, Borck of Rollingen—to undertake this lawsuit. Not on your behalf, but in the interest of us all. The thing ought to be known. There: I have set my heart on this, and I hope you won't refuse."

"My dear friend, I must. As soon as I am able, I shall speak to a lawyer; the money is undoubtedly mine. As for these Rexelaers, whose story you appear to know, I have allowed them to call themselves my cousins and to parade as such even at Deynum. I have never—God is my witness!—shewn up the sham, while scandal alone would have been the result. But, now, it is they who have forced the revelation upon me; I must defend my wife and child."

"I am delighted to hear you say that," cried Baron Borck, rising. "As a favour, I hope you will let me do what I can. By the bye, I bought the historical articles at your sale, to complete my collection. And, before coming here, I slipped this into my pocket. It has no value for us; my wife would burn it. I thought perhaps yours might care to have it. My respects to her. Good-bye."

The Baroness had not put in an appearance. She could not bring herself to think kindly of "the Atheist."

Baron Rexelaer opened the parcel his visitor had left on the table. It contained the costly fifteenth-century livre d'heures, with its beautiful initials and miniatures, which has ever been the greatest treasure of the Châtelaines of Deynum. They call it "the Lady Bertha's Closet-book."

But you cannot make bread out of books, except you sell them,—not even then, unless they are not your own. And the means of procuring bread were growing scarce; they all three knew it, while hiding it from each other.

One evening Wendela came back to the Baron, after helping her mother to bed. Even this depth of sorrow could not bring father and daughter together, while between them lay the angry shadow of their loss.

“Wanda,” began the old man, “I have been thinking of late I should like to find something to occupy my time instead of moping here all day. I feel much stronger. I have made up my mind to have in some little boys to teach them”—he went on hurriedly—“I shall teach them French. I have spoken about it to Juffrouw Donders, who is a very sensible woman and quite sees what I mean. She has been most kind about finding me the pupils. I mention this to you, because they are coming to-morrow morning, and I should wish you to explain to your mother what it is, when they are come. I will have them in the bedroom; that will do very well.”

Wendela sat opposite her father, gazing, without response.

“They are little Jew-boys,” the Baron continued musingly. “I cannot help wishing they had not been that. But the feeling is one of foolish prejudice; I am heartily ashamed of it, and I daresay it will wear off in time.”

“Did you say they were coming to-morrow morning?” asked Wendela in a constrained voice.

"To-morrow morning at nine. They are quite small children, and I apprehend no serious difficulty. I consider it better to tell you that I am to receive—remuneration, so that we must not look upon the lessons as a favour we are doing them. I am to receive tenpence per hour for each child."

"Tenpence per hour," echoed Wendela.

"I admit that I myself did not consider that very much. But then we must take into account how little I have to offer. Speaking a language is a very different thing from teaching it. And I have never taught." He said these last words in a tone of apology, for himself, or his patrons, or both.

Wendela did not reply, and they sat opposite each other, neither disturbing the other's thoughts, beside the gloomy lamp.

At last Wendela rose. "Good-night, Papa," she said, and held out her hand.

"Good-night, my dear. God bless you."

She turned away and moved slowly to the door. She had reached it and laid her hand on the knob; then she came back and, without a word of explanation, sank on the floor by his knees and covered his hands with her kisses. "Voyons, voyons," he said, his lips trembling under his white moustache. "What is it? What is wrong? Voyons."

But she did not reply. She gathered herself up slowly and left him to his thoughts. They cannot have been so very dismal, for he smiled.

Next morning, the four little Jew-boys being shut up in the bedroom with their new preceptor, Wendela

went down to the basement to look for Juffrouw Donders. She found her in the kitchen, making a pudding with her own dumpy hands. Much ruffled by the Freule's intrusion on her privacy, Juffrouw Donders was eager to explain that she never demeaned herself by household work—no never; only once in a way she had tried a new receipt, which her cousin, the pastry-cook, had sent her. She was accurate and voluminous in this assertion of her dignity, Wendela, meanwhile, standing by in patient disgust, conscious of her father's occupation upstairs and her own errand at the moment. Juffrouw Donders was not as charmed with her poor, proud lodgers as she had been three weeks ago. Her brother's reticence annoyed her. "Give them of your very best," was all that Gustave said.

"Juffrouw," said Wendela resolutely, "do you happen to know of anyone who wants to learn to sing?" She had sought out that sole accomplishment all through the sleepless night.

"Good gracious, I can't find pupils for the whole family!" said the landlady. After a moment she added a little more civilly: "You might advertise," and then she resumed her pudding-making, leaving the Freule to appreciate, slowly and fully, the beauty of a humble heart. Wendela crept upstairs again.

An advertisement attracted two families, one with an only daughter and one with a brace of girls. A young man also presented himself, but him the Baron vetoed. Ultimately the only daughter—a cheese-monger's—agreed to pay the stipulated price of fifty cents* an hour, but the mother of the pair of pupils—

* = tenpence.

a butcher's lady—after having requested the singing-mistress to shew her powers ("First a serious piece, please, and then a gay one") declared very decidedly that she could not give more than eighteenpence the two. Wendela came away from that interview a different creature. Till now her innocent wrongs, endured in isolation, had hardened and, if the word be permissible, haughtened her. For the first time humiliation struck her straight, soiling her soul with mud. Where now was the glory of this sordid shame? A hot flush melted the pure proud ice, and, as it melted, she saw it turn to mire. At last she understood that no greatness of ancestry can save us from disgrace. And her heart was emptied, of all but bitterness.

In the shelter of her early girlhood it had been easy for so high-souled a nature to fly from the hateful present into the calm splendour of a mythic past. The woman, face to face with life's vulgarity, laughed aloud. Knight Pilgrim, riding away into the darkness, never even turned to look back.

"Mine are at least Gentiles," she said to her father, fiercely.

"Hush, Wanda. They are very nice little boys." When the first lesson was over, the Baroness had called softly to her husband. "Come close," she said and, as he bent over her: "Mon ami, you are still so weak!"

"No, it was quite necessary," he answered. "But when I have settled with the lawyer, all will be right. I cannot make any more debts. I cannot. You must not mind."

"Mind?" she repeated wistfully. "I cannot be prouder of you than I am, Reinout. As for lessons, Louis Philippe gave them, and he was not even a gentleman."

Two days later the Baron called on Spangenberg. "I will look into the matter as soon as possible, Mynheer," said the busy young lawyer, "and I earnestly hope we shall be able to set it right."

"I should like to know whether the expense to be incurred—in no case should I care to incur great expense."

"Oh, never mind the expense," said Christian.

The Baron drew himself up stiffly. "No, but I must beg of you," he said, "if possible, to furnish me with an approximate estimate——"

"Ten florins," said Christian. The Baron gave a great gasp of relief. Why, his watch must be worth at least a hundred!

"I am much obliged to you, Mynheer the Advocate," he replied with his old-fashioned bow.

In the street, as he went limping home, he twice repeated to himself, "There is nothing more humbling than being a man to whom all men may shew kindness. Yet, had I been truly a good man, I should never have found that out."

CHAPTER XV.

A CLANDESTINE CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE LOVE
LEFT OUT.

VOLKERT duly fetched books from the University Library for Mevrouw Morèl. After a time he began to think she required a good many. He brought them to "Paradise" in cabs, for he was not yet accustomed to walking the streets with a parcel.

"Tell me honestly," said Spangenberg one day, "does not Mother Morèl's gratitude cause you greater pleasure than any number of letters admiring your beautiful sentiments?" "I like the letters too," replied his friend. "You are jealous because you never got any." "Forgive me, Volkert; remember I am your officially appointed Mentor." "Yes, but I did not say you were always to be on duty." "True," said Spangenberg, holding out his hand.

Still, in his heart of heart, Volkert would have been obliged to admit that his first endurance of personal inconvenience, after twenty-four years of facile generosity, friendliness and almsgiving—had brought him a completely new sensation. He recalled with a sneer at himself, how, before his meeting with the editor, all men about him, himself not least, had praised him for being so "free of his money," so "condescend-

ing to inferiors," so "good." And for the first time in his life, in some strange revulsion of reasoning, he gave the cabman who brought him and his books from the library no more than his legal fare. "Charity," he began to feel, meant something of which he had never heard.

"Spangenberg is exceedingly busy," said Mynheer Morèl. The old poet had got hold of the young one as an agreeable substitute for Balby. "And that too is a good work," reflected Christian. "And what a privilege for Mynheer Volkert," said Mevrouw Morèl, running to the window to catch a glimpse of the perambulating pair. "Spangenberg is exceedingly busy," said Mynheer. "It is his mission to be always doing something, as it is some men's to remain apparently inactive. The latter are the more important class. Believe me, my dear young friend, the world owes most things to its laziest men. Conquerors and statesmen are rockets and catherine-wheels. The courses of the human race are guided from the thinker's easy-chair."

Volkert liked Mynheer Morèl, not only for this affinity which caused Christian such alarm. He liked the gentle, reposeful courtesy of the philosopher, the avoidance of all that was coarse and loud. In the midst of the turmoil of his tiny home the old gentleman sat composed, and motioned his visitor to a chair with quiet dignity, as if unaware of the hole in its covering which even Mevrouw Morèl's dexterity could no longer conceal. To the young man, lapped in luxury, it was delightful to discover how utterly careless of creature comforts some of the world's best and

wisest can be. He had never before met with men of education and refinement who could not distinguish vintages or who did not cavil at the taste of their cheese.

He enjoyed being present at the harum-scarum tea among a tumbling crowd of healthful children. There was not always enough to eat, but who shall say when seven children have enough? "Mevrouw," said her guest on one occasion, "with your permission I shall present to Freddie (æt. 8) your book on 'Amanda's Appletart or the Fatal Effects of Greediness.'" "I never go in to Mevrouw Morel at meal-times," explained little Miss van Dolder to her more fashionable friends, "the feeding of the children is too painfully distressing." With this dictum Mevrouw Morel would have agreed, as she wiped her pen at two in the morning. Juffrouw Spangenberg had no patience with her. "Why, indeed, must she write about the convolutions of the child? The medical men knew all about them already, for Juffrouw Spangenberg's own Christian had had them as a two-year-old baby, and their doctor had pulled him through!"

Meanwhile "The Cry of the People" continued to publish the young poet's effusions, still signed with a single "P." And letters addressed to that "P" continued also, at fitful intervals, to arrive at the office, always anonymous, always written in the same female hand. Gradually, in these letters, the soul of the writer began to reveal itself before the poet's fascinated gaze. It was a delightfully mysterious manner of making an acquaintance. He answered, as best he could, through the columns of "The Cry."

In the beginning the letters had been completely impersonal; the first half-a-dozen did not contain a single "I." The fair writer admired the poems and frankly said how and why. "The present is hideous," she wrote, "the past is dead. Oh the relief of meeting, in this world of tranquil, smiling evil, with a soul that believes in the future, with a heart that burns red, like a beacon, in the light of the coming day." Christian would have objected: "Her metaphors are mixed." Mynheer Morel would have declared "She is young." Volkert felt: "Such beautiful thought must belong to a beautiful face."

In the seventh scrap—they were all short, a rare merit—the "I" put in its appearance. "I have suffered wrong all my life," it said, "but I have always believed it divinely ordained. From the 'Cry of the People' I have learned for the first time that wrong is wrong and may be combated, that men *must* combat it so as to leave to those who come a better world than ours."

For reply he took the economist's pleasant maxim "All is for the best in the best-regulated of worlds" and, in burning verses, tore it to shreds.

"I am trying to understand," said the next letter. "My parents have always believed that God guides and orders all things, and of the most monstrous injustice which befalls them they say: 'It is His will.' The world is divinely based on law and justice, wealth and poverty, sin and suffering; only change is evil. Wrong is right because it *is*. Devout Christianity seems so like Mohammedanism, with a little personal appeal thrown in to make all suffering worse. But I am bewildered; I have always rebelled. Is it possible, as you

think, that an era is approaching, when our smug, smirking society will stand out in the face of God, a naked lie? If so, if in the far-away ages a new world were possible, then the life of each stone on the path were worth living indeed. God bless you; you have given me *hope*." His next poem was entitled "Kismet."

But her answer was in quite a different tone. "You are still young,"—the words startled him; he was somewhat ashamed of the keenness of their pang—"When you have suffered as much as I have, you will not cast yourself with such glowing confidence on 'the Rock of God's Right.' The shipwrecked are afraid of rocks. No, let us give up demanding our own happiness, analyzing our own sufferings. To work for others; that is the task. The glory of the world's future; that, *perhaps*, may be the reward. So much you have taught me; I can never thank you enough for it. Strange that I should have selected your scarce-launched vessel to tow my broken hulk into port."

The poet did not like the "broken hulk" at all. It sounded suggestive of an old maid with a miniature, an upward glance of the eye, and a cat.

Spangenberg, on the other hand, was delighted with "Kismet." "You are actually beginning to see some good in 'to-day,'" he said. "That is encouraging. No benefactor of the human race was ever made up entirely of wrath."

The letters now ceased for some time. Volkert reflected, ungratefully, that they had been written by an elderly sentimentalist to a boy. And he remembered how frequently of late his thoughts had reverted to the beautiful image of his "Muse." Well, she was straight-

forward, and had stopped him. By-the-bye, he had signed his last verses in full: "Pelgrim," and this he now continued to do. "A charming name!" said Spangenberg, "I had always thought your P stood for Peter or Paul."

About this time, unfortunately, Spangenberg fell ill from over-activity and was obliged to stop at home, fretting, for so do busy men rest. The "Cry" not being allowed to enter his father's house, he could not even see what a mess his sub-editor was making of the business. But his mother brought him some excellent jelly and coddled and cuddled him in a flurry of tranquil enjoyment.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE STORY OF RI-KSI-LA AND THE DEY NOUM.

UNDER these depressing circumstances Volkert stopped away longer than usual from "Little Paradise." None of them knew what became of him during the intervals. He followed no profession; he appeared to be possessed of liberal means. "Have you a mother?" Mevrouw Morèl had once asked him in the ordinary course of conversation, with a gentle lingering over the word. The young man had paused, as if for a moment's reflection; then, abruptly, he had answered, "No."

One morning he remembered with sudden compunction how pathetically Mevrouw Morèl had complained, the last time they met, of the absence from all the public libraries of that absolutely indispensable work, Schlafenmützel's *Kinderjahre der Deutschen Kaiser*. He had searched for it everywhere in vain. He now telegraphed for a copy from Leipzig (in eleven quarto volumes) and had it addressed to the office, whence he fetched it a few days later, carrying over about half as a foretaste, to Mevrouw Morèl's door. Finding this open, he bumped his way upstairs and staggered into the lady's presence, there suddenly to halt in awkward and annoyed surprise. For a woman, a stranger, lay with her head on the table, completely thrown forward upon

her hands. Her shawl had slipped back and hung loose, revealing a beautiful neck; she was dressed tawdrily, vulgarly, not as good women dress. Little Mevrouw Morèl stood beside her, smoothing, with one affectionate hand, her coils of chestnut hair, and speaking rapid, earnest words meanwhile. The woman, who was sobbing convulsively, lifted her head with a frightened jerk, and the unwelcome visitor let all his books drop in a crash on the floor. The face was unknown to him, it must have been a pretty face once; now it was oh so despairing in its practised effrontery. The young man stammered a few words of apology and fled; Mevrouw Morèl followed him out to the landing. "It is nothing," she said, "but oh the books from the library! I hope you have not injured them!" Volkert, as he walked back to the office, rejoiced in the picture of her surprise.

The hungry-faced clerk was seated at his desk as usual, his protuberant nose inclined across his work. The office, like the clerk, was gaunt, unkempt, aggressively wretched. It looked as if it had never been new, the clerk as if he had never been young.

"Wonnema," began Volkert, "do you know a young lady"—his socialism largely consisted in calling everyone a "lady" or "gentleman"; with some people it takes that form—"do you know a young lady who comes to see Mevrouw Morèl in a light-green shawl?" He was not ashamed of his inquisitiveness; the poor bold, sorrowful face had fully aroused his pity.

"Has the 'lady,'" asked the clerk with a sneer, "a red face and pale-blue eyes?"

"Yes."

"Then I can tell you about her, if you really care to know. That girl is called Dora Droste. Ten years ago she was a kitchen wench in the Royal Palace; she was ignorant, foolish, and honest. Nowadays she is none of all three. If you want to account for the change, you must ask one of the king's great lords, but I fancy you will experience some difficulty, for he is a very great lord indeed. I have asked him twice without receiving an answer; the last time I did so I had the satisfaction of knocking him down. I think that's about all."

"Not all," objected the auditor, putting together the remaining volumes of *Schlafenmützel* which lay beside their box on the floor. "I don't see how the nobleman was responsible for what she is now."

"Nor did the noble man, as you correctly style him. This noble man was at the head of the Royal Buttery-department; she was under him. He dismissed her with contumely, when her disgrace was consummated, seeking, and finding, safety for himself in the vehemence of his persecution. The girl's future was irremediably ruined. She came to me—I also was a slave in the Palace at that time—and I lost my situation for taking her in. But she had a proud spirit and would eat her own bread. My lord of the Buttery had left her but one way of earning it."

"And what has *Mevrouw Morel* to do with her?"

"*Mevrouw Morel*, were she wiser, would leave her in peace. She lives near us; I don't mind her, nor do the children. It's not she that's to blame." He ground his heel into the floor.

"You must not blame the noble too much," said

Volkert. "He was like other nobles. He didn't know."

"Not know? I took care that he knew!" cried Wonnema. "I appealed to him for her, for the child, which is long since dead! He laughed. I believe he said the child was mine. Not know, indeed! An easy excuse!"

"I only meant to say," replied Volkert, pausing by the staircase, "that you cannot understand. That class looks upon these things so differently. I have no doubt but this lord of the buttery is, according to his lights, a most honourable man."

The words seemed to enrage Wonnema. He thrust back his desk. "An honourable man!" he cried violently. "And you venture to say that here!" He flung across a newspaper. "Take that upstairs with you and talk about honourable men!"

"I did not mean to offend you," said the young man calmly. "How long ago did all this happen?"

"About ten years ago."

Volkert went upstairs to the editor's room with the newspaper in his hand. It was the most recent number of "The Cry of the People"; he threw himself on the sofa and leisurely looked it through. First he read his own verses and was annoyed by an awkward misprint, and then his eyes dropped to the paragraph immediately beneath them which he saw marked with a pencil cross. It was named: "Two Stories about One Gentleman" and ran as follows:

There was a great Chinese Mandarin called Ri-Ksi-La, the first favourite of the Emperor. His wife's uncle died, and Ri-Ksi-La succeeded to a vast estate

bequeathed by the uncle to the niece. But soon after came a priest to the Mandarin and said: "O Lord, here is another will, a later one. And it proves that my Lord, your Lady's dead uncle, wished all his possessions to pass to Buddha, that good might be done with them." "Let Buddha come and fetch them," said Ri-Ksi-La. Buddha has not come yet, and Ri-Ksi-La is still first favourite of the Emperor.

There was a great Turkish Pasha, called the Dey Noun, and he was first favourite of his master, the Sultan. He had a beautiful wife who had brought him all his money. And one morning there came a stranger to his divan and said: "O Dey, your wife's father was a slave-merchant in the far markets of Asia, and the slaves whom he sold were white." And the Dey Noun made answer: "I know it. The markets are far, and the money is near." The money is still there, and the Dey Noun is first favourite of the Sultan.

The young man from the Hague sat a long time motionless, with the paper in his hand. Presently Wonnema looked in. "Can I have that paper back?" he said. "I had marked it. I am going to send it to the great noble we were speaking of just now."

"What farrago of nonsense is this!" the other burst out. "You know how vehemently opposed the chief is to personal scandals. The thing will cost you your situation, as likely as not."

"I have thought of that," replied the clerk with quiet intensity. "When, after ten years' waiting, a

man's revenge falls ripe within his reach, he does not withhold his hand."

"And what proof have you," cried the young man passionately, "of these covert charges against Count Rexelaer van Deynum? Probably none at all."

Wonnema produced a couple of documents from a locked cupboard. "Be careful, please," he said, with a white flicker in his fierce eyes. "I have seen the originals. They were brought by a foreigner. He will be here again to-morrow, and you can speak to him if you like."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A HUNTED HARE.

"I CANNOT understand Mamma," said Jane, arranging her tea-cups. It was evening, and Rolline was having tea with her. "Nor need I. As for me, perhaps because of the failure of her attempts to enrich me, I do not think money is everything. And I would rather not have had it than sit opposite Miss Kops."

"Oh, he needn't sit opposite to her more than he chooses," replied Rolline, gently stretching herself in a lady-like manner, and admiring her feet, the only part of her person which remained resolutely small. "And I must say I envy him the way Papuum succeeds. My husband says that they use it at the Palace. It has just been introduced into England, where ten thousand pounds are being spent on advertisement. They've got two Tatua Papuas there in some public building, the Westminster—Westminster Hall,* I believe, and everybody's allowed to come and tattoo them all over and rub out the marks again. And every night all the Harries of London come and scribble their names over the wretched creatures' arms."

"I know, I know," said Jane impatiently. "Well, I

* Aquarium?

may be old-fashioned, but for me there is honourable and dishonourable money still."

"And what do you call honourable money?"

"Inherited money," replied Jane promptly. "Like Uncle Hil's, for instance. Or Cousin Borck's of Rollingen."

"You are less tolerant than poor grandmamma, who ought to have known. Did I tell you what Monsieur de Bonnaventure wrote in my album?"

"No. I don't like Monsieur de Bonnaventure."

"Nor do I, but I asked him to write in my album. Everybody does. And he wrote: 'Mon expérience de la vie se résume en un seul mot: L'or dure.' It was very nasty of him and in execrable taste."

"I wish," said Jane meaningly, "that people would not speak so much of Monsieur de Bonnaventure."

Rolline modestly dropped her eyes. "As for that," she said presently, "there are a good many things I wish people would not speak so much about. What do you say to the two little stories in the 'Cry of the People' which have been all over the place?"

"I say, as my husband does, that nobody ought to have read them. People ought not to know such a paper exists."

"People didn't, but this number, they say, is out of print. I go out more than you do, and I assure you I see the story in everybody's face. My husband made me a terrible scene, as if it were any fault of mine."

"Pleasant for Reinout," said Jane, beginning to wash up.

"Oh, it won't hurt Reinout, for the will is undoubtedly valid here. It is worst for Aunt Margherita,

but one can't pity her, she makes such a fool of herself. The best thing she could do would be to retire definitely among her cockatoos and canary-birds and never be heard of again. But she goes out more than ever,—tight-laced, over-dressed, powdered and rouged,—since this thing got about."

"And it is this money which Mamma wants Topsy to marry."

"Poor Topsy, I don't think she has a ghost of a chance."

"She knows it," said Jane angrily, "and she doesn't care."

"Jane——"

"Well?"

"I wonder whether Uncle Hil knew when he married her."

But the baby cried out in the adjoining room, and Jane went to look at it. When she came back, she said, pursuing her thoughts: "I pity Reinout all the same. He is an honourable man."

"Oh, I don't pretend to understand Reinout; he is different from everybody," said Rolline.

"Reinout's education was destined to deaden every feeling but worldliness; with most men it would have succeeded, and what a success! He might have been a Talleyrand, as Uncle Hilarius once said to me. But other feelings have survived and caused the whole man to fail. He is like those two life-long prisoners released from the Bastille who did not know what to do with their freedom. He knows that he ought to feel nobly, and doesn't know how and yet can't live without it. I believe he is a miserable man."

"Nonsense, Jane, how excited you are! Quite a romance about poor, good-natured Reinout. I meet him constantly—at least I used to before this scandal; it looks rather cowardly in him to hide. He always seemed to enjoy himself and he flirted a good deal, I fancy. He is going out to Russia in a month or two, and he will die an ambassador, covered with stars, at his beautiful seat of Deynum. Poor Reinout, indeed!"

"All that is true," replied Jane, "the worse for him. He is hedged in on every side. Nobody can understand what that means, until he has tried to break loose. Supposing you and I were suddenly to wish to become Roman Catholics——"

"I?" cried Rolline, sitting up. "How preposterous you are, Jane!"

"It is only by way of comparison——"

"Conrad's family would never allow it."

"That is just what I mean. Perhaps our husbands would threaten to deprive us of our children, and we might end by becoming Catholics on the sly. I imagine that Reinout, deep down in his heart, lives a life of his own. The life that we see is his father's."

"You talk of him as if he were a cat," said Rolline. "I don't want to hear anything about any man's two lives, and I think it's rather a shame of you to suggest such things of Reinout. I should sooner think it of Guy from the horrid tales that I hear."

"Guy!" said Jane with ineffable contempt. "I don't know what set me talking to-night. I have never mentioned the subject to anyone but Antoinette. I will tell you something about Reinout, though. One evening,

more than a year ago, when everybody had been speaking of his brilliant prospects, he came up to me suddenly and burst out, 'I would give it all to be a *man*!' He was strongly moved, as I saw, but he walked away immediately, and a moment later was laughing with Dolly Foulise."

"He isn't a woman," said Rolline sulkily, but Jane did not heed her. "Perhaps these revelations will help him," she thought to herself, over her tea-tray. "Perhaps!" Aloud, she changed the subject: "As for Guy, it is to be hoped he will marry Cécile and settle down at last."

"She will hardly make him a good wife," said Rolline. "However, Mamma is set upon it, and has not left Cécile an hour of peace since the poor thing went to live with them."

"Cécile is certainly a 'poor thing,' but she deserves a *nicer* husband than Guy. However, she is nearly thirty and must look after herself. But I suppose she's been bullied too long by Grandmamma not to have forgotten how to say no."

"Come, Jane, you, who had never been bullied by Grandmamma, forgot how to say no, when Mamma nagged at you from morning till night."

"True," replied Jane, and a slight flush spread over her sallow face. "And you, who were less strong-minded than I, yet got your own way. Perhaps Mamma would tell us she never was short-sighted."

After that Rolline looked cross, and neither sister was very sorry when the cab came at half-past nine.

Jane remained thoughtful, with her pointed chin on her hand, in her poor little drawing-room. She was musing on the irony of life, which always grins at you, even when it hurts you most. At first, when she had married a husband she did not care for, she had comforted herself with the thought of all the pleasant things his father's death would bring her. She would buy any quantity of costly books and have a "salon" and invite the clever people whom her own set never saw. There was one man who daily passed her father's house with whom she had long desired to pick an acquaintance, a man with flowing hair and a pale, thought-laden face—perhaps an artist; she had even been a little "smitten," as a girl. She would give private theatricals—pretty little pieces, purposely written—and the papers would speak of them. And, above all, she would have a real studio and devote herself in earnest to what Rolline was wont to call her "nasty, sticky painting-mess." Girlish fancies: in her plain-spoken manner she had stipulated for these things, and the thought had reconciled her to marrying Simmans. That was eight years ago and more: her father-in-law was now eighty-two. She loathed herself for desiring his death; the idea was the misery of her life. Yet she knew he would not die. He would never die. Nor would it matter much now if he did. She had got to like her husband; she was overburdened with children; her painting, and poetry, and all the rest of it, had died away from her life long ago. She hardly found time, nowadays, to read a good book, when she could get one. It had been her life-long desire to possess a complete Thackeray; Mevrouw Elizabeth only paid for

dress; Simmans could not always pay satisfactorily for that. If any lover of literature and the human race (are the two not one?) read this page and be able to do a good deed at no great sacrifice, let him send a cheap edition—the green cloth one will do—to Mevrouw Simmans-van Rexelaer, Bankastraat, the Hague. Last Wednesday was old Simmans's birthday; the old gentleman gave a family dinner-party, and Jane had to go.

A ring at the house-bell; Jane glanced towards the clock—a quarter past ten. She did not expect her husband till eleven. It was not her husband; the maid announced in accents of mildest astonishment: "The Freule van Borck," and Cécile came hurriedly in.

"What has happened?" cried Jane, starting up, "Papa?" All the children van Rexelaer liked their quiet father best.

Cécile sank down on a chair. Her face was white, her whole manner distraught. She could not speak, but with trembling fingers she fumbled at the clasp of her heavy cloak, till it fell from her shoulder, disclosing her soft white dinner-dress.

"What is it?" cried Jane, now thoroughly frightened. "Which of them is ill? Why can't you speak?"

"Nobody is ill," gasped Cécile. "Oh, Jane, you must help me!" and she burst into hysterical weeping.

"Hush, hush," urged Jane tenderly. Hers was not a nature that easily showed pity, either to herself, or to others. She stood awkwardly beside her cousin till the latter's sobs subsided. Then she said: "Now tell me."

But Cécile did not lift her face from the hands in which she had hidden it. Once or twice her throat moved vainly, and at last she whispered through her knitted fingers: "I can never go back again." Jane bent low to catch the words; she was utterly at a loss to understand.

"I can never go back to your mother's again. Oh, Jane, I am not safe there;" and now Cécile began to cry afresh, but quietly, with that heart-broken continuance which comes of a lasting wound.

"If Guy has insulted you," said Jane with horrible perspicacity, "why didn't you tell Mamma, instead of running away here?"

"I don't know," replied Cécile without altering her attitude. "Don't let us speak of it. Only you must help me, that is all."

"But if I am to help you, I must understand," pleaded Jane. "What do you want me to do?"

"Hide me. Shield me. Oh Jane, perhaps I am very foolish. I have never been accustomed to look after anything. But I can't marry him."

"Well, then, tell him so plainly."

"I have done that, more than once. And I told Aunt Elizabeth—I really did—that she might have all my money, but she only grew very angry and said I had insulted her. And—and"—the Freule's voice again failed her—"I *can't* go back," she burst out passionately. "Antoinette helped me to get away and told me to come here. I ran all the way. Help me, Jane."

Jane rose from the floor, on which she had sunk to listen, and stood pondering. "It is my own mother,"

she said at last, "Henry is just expecting his promotion, and we are looking to Papa to help us through with it. If Mamma knew I had thwarted her, she would never forgive me."

For the first time Cécile lifted her terror-struck face.

"You are not going to desert me?" she cried. "I have nobody. Topsy said she felt sure you would help."

"Let Topsy speak for herself," replied Jane; she felt goaded. "Of course I will help you," she added more kindly. "Yes, I *will*. This, I think, will be best. My aunt Gratia Rexelaer is staying with her friend the Freule van Weylert; I will give you a letter to her. You are so agitated, perhaps you had better spend the night with them, and, if to-morrow morning your impression remains the same, well, you are of age, and nobody can force you to return home. I should advise you, in that case, to consult with Cousin Borck of Rolingen."

Her calm, strong voice did not lose its effect on the fluttering soul. "But Aunt Elizabeth has always said," Cécile began timidly, "that, as I am not yet thirty, my guardian can force me to marry whom he likes."

"Mamma confuses two different laws," replied Jane firmly. "You have no guardian and, your parents being dead, you are free to do as you will"—an immense expression of relief came over the poor girl's anxious face—"Dear Cécile, you will have to look after yourself a little; none of us must trust too much to others to look after them."

"I must try," said Cécile desperately, "but I haven't any money. Nothing but the few florins in my purse and even that I left on my toilet-table."

Jane smiled. "That excuses Mamma's saying Papa must take care of you. Now I shall send for a cab. You can't go much farther in that dress."

"Won't you come with me, Jane? I hardly know your aunt."

"I can't: I don't want Henry to know; he is already sufficiently worried about his promotion. It is as likely as not Aunt Gratia will tell, for she can't keep a quiet tongue in her head. But we must risk that. I really think it is the best thing for you to spend the night in a neutral house. Why, they may be here at any moment, inquiring for you!"

"They may," screamed Cécile, starting up, as if she already heard footsteps in the street. "Save me, dearest, for your children's sake! Oh, Jane, how long the cab is coming!"

"I have sent for it," said Jane soothingly. "I dare say Topsy has told them you were in bed with a headache."

"I couldn't lock my own door," said Cécile, and then silence lay heavy between them till the cab came lumbering round.

The Freule Alette van Weylert and the Freule Gratia van Rexelaer were sitting quietly and comfortably in the former's softly lighted, thickly curtained, darkly furnished back drawing-room. Each elderly lady had her knitting beside her and in front of her a costly old Japanese plate, from which she had just

partaken of her nightly flavourless "pap." The knitting was missionary knitting. The Freule Rexelaer was very thin and frail, the Freule Weylert broad and substantial. At the Freule Weylert's elbow lay a great gilt Bible from which she was about to read a chapter before the two ladies retired to rest. The Freule was looking for her spectacles. The gilt clock on the seventeenth-century mantel-piece sang out the hour of eleven, and its great Dutch comrade in the hall boomed adhesion.

When Cécile was introduced, the reposeful room, the kind faces of the two old maids, above all the open Bible, seemed to inspire her with confidence. She gave Jane's letter to the Freule Gratia. The Freule Gratia read it in silence and passed it on to the Freule Alette. The latter looked up at Cécile, over her spectacles, and nodded, but a firm expression settled about her chin.

"You can certainly stay here if you wish, child," she said. "Sit down, my dear; ring, and I will tell them to pay the cab. It's no use wasting money."

"I promised Jane to ask you to tear up that note, Freule," began Cécile, addressing the Freule van Rexelaer.

"Oh but, Cécile, I must read it again."

"But you will, after that,—won't you?—because I promised Jane to see it done."

"Now, I like that," remarked the comfortable mistress of the house, "always keep your promises and don't make any you can't keep. You are right to come here, my dear. Will you have some pap? No? Well, I must tell them to air you a bed. I am afraid you

will have to put up with my maid's things. Mine would hardly fit you." She smiled.

"And to-morrow she will have to come down to breakfast in that dress!" said the Freule van Rexelaer, folding her hands. This idea seemed especially to preoccupy the quiet little lady.

"She can send to your sister-in-law's to-morrow and she can stay here as long as she likes," answered Freule van Weylert, searching for the place in her Bible.

"It is very kind of you, Alette. And quite right. Only, I am sorry. My sister-in-law will be so vexed."

"You cannot help that, nor can I. Some one of my relations has been vexed with me all my life. You cannot endeavour to act right and please relations who want you to act wrong."

"No, no," said the Freule Gratia hurriedly, "poor Cécile!"

The mistress of the house settled her spectacles on her nose, and once again shot across one of those sharp glances at Cécile.

"My dear," she said, "I am very rheumatic. Would you come here for a moment? I should like to give you a kiss." And, as the young girl bent over her, Freule Alette, looking up into her troubled face, laid one hand on the open volume.

"Do you know, at all," she asked, "where to look for comfort in the sorest trouble?"

"Yes," said Cécile very softly.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BARON'S CONFESSION.

WHEN "Pelgrim's" correspondent had not written for three weeks he began to find out how much he missed her letters. "I am vain," he said to himself, as we sometimes do, liking ourselves for saying it. But this poet was not spoilt by over-encouragement. Literary men did not see "The Cry."

He felt quite glad one morning to find the familiar handwriting awaiting him. "I do not know why I write," said the letter "I had made up my mind not to address you again, but how often have I not done that, and torn up the page! There seems some bond between you and me; you have robbed me of my old reliance; I am looking to you for future strength. I am weary of the old dead greatness; you, the plebeian, though you cannot understand us, you have taught me that each man's own soul is his only pride or shame. There is no outward splendour, no adventitious sorrow, there is nothing in all the world but this naked 'I' and God. It is naturally a lesson for a man of the people to teach.

"For that you are a man of the people all your poems prove. That you are no longer young I knew when first I wrote; for a moment I was led to doubt, but

your last verses again proclaim me right. I can now say frankly that I like you. I am sure you are a good man."

The poet smiled as he folded up the sheet.

"She jumps at conclusions," he said to himself. "Poor old lady, she is charmingly prude!"

Spangenberg was up again and hard at work. His first week was spent in alternate disapproval of Wonnema and commendation of Piet. "I should certainly send Wonnema about his business," Spangenberg confessed to Volkert, "if I could take away his children's appetites first." So Wonnema stayed. "I've had my say," said the clerk unrepentantly. Like so many, he was a "personal" socialist, made such by personal wrong. His master, on the other hand, was a practical, hard-working idealist, striving by all the means in his power to embody his beautiful hopes. Piet Poster, poor fellow, was devoid of political opinions. He saw the nearest duty and did it.

He was working desperately hard 'just now for his Law-examination. "And when you are a notary and a gentleman, Piet," Spangenberg once said to him, laughing, "you can propose for the hand of your Freule." "Don't, sir, please," said Piet scribbling hard. The lawyer was going to add something about a better-dowered bride, but a look at the young clerk's face suddenly checked him. "My illness has thrown back the Baron's business," he merely said as he turned away.

Certainly Wendela would not prove a well-dowered bride. "Fifty cents an hour," declared the butcher's lady, "is more than sufficient remuneration in the case of a young person who is more remarkable for her airs than for her tunes." Wendela had a hard time of it with the butcher's lady, but she honestly did her best, and fortunately she was too proud to feel offended at the woman's vulgarity. "The girls don't improve," said the butcher's wife, "in spite of their exceptional talent." "Would you wish to stop the lessons?" asked Wendela, lifting indifferent eyes to the fat, red face above the piano. "No, Juffrouw, but for you to take more pains," said the woman, glorying in the deeply Dutch insult of that "Juffrouw" to the daughter of the Rexelaers.

Wendela hurried home to build up the imposing structure of her mother's snow-white coiffure. It is a ridiculously small detail, but it came back every day, remorselessly.

"It can't be helped," said Wendela. We never say that till the spirit of protest awakens within us. But hers sank to rest again as she looked across at her father and heard him telling how pleased he was that one of his little Jews had repeated the verb "aimer" without a single hitch. Yet again she reasoned: "He has brought his trials on himself. I am innocent." That thought was the long sorrow of her life, worse, a thousand times worse, than the loss of all the rest. She was angry with this estimable, this beautiful old man; and in the daily presence of his virtues she hated her bootless wrath. From a few careless words, caught up at the time of the loss of the Castle and erroneously interpreted, she had gained an impression that her

father had wasted his property. She did not know what "speculation" meant, but she knew it to be a very wicked sin. Was her mother aware of her father's crime? She fancied not. Even in her childhood she had hidden away his guilt and wept over it and prayed till all faith in prayer died away in her heart.

The Baron tottered feebly across the dingy room, from his chair to the window, from the window to his chair. "It is quite amusing, my dear," he said, "to watch the movement on the canal. Human activity, after all, is more interesting than stones and trees. Let me wheel you into the sunshine." The Baroness roused herself with an effort. She hated the canal. "It smells;" that was all the impression it conveyed to her, even while March winds still kept the windows closed. But when spring came round, the slow Dutch spring, and the watery sun peeped out from time to time and a couple of consumptive trees began to swell a little at their finger-tips, what did she say then? The overpowering odour of garbage penetrated everywhere, and yet it was but a herald of the foetid oppression which summer would bring. Even the Baron grew sorrowful with the approach of the mild weather. He had been contented in the city while nature still lay dead. But the breaking of the poor grey-green shimmer over the canal-trees seemed to stir him in the depths of his soul. He would sit looking out for hours, but no longer at the bustle of human activity,—at green fields, perhaps, and golden butter-cups? "I should like to see some grass again," he once said, not to his wife or daughter, but to a new friend who came in of evenings, the landlady's only other lodger, be-

sides Piet. And one day he brought home a little pot of pale mauve crocuses; mother and daughter looked up in amazement at such extravagance. But next morning he gave it away again, to one of his little Jew-boys.

Juffrouw Donders's other lodger had been with her for thirty years, as she was proud of repeating to all and sundry. He had gone, fresh from the Amsterdam "Athenæum," to teach Greek and Latin to the lowest form at the Amsterdam Grammar School, and he was teaching there still. Boys might come and boys might go, but he went on for ever. On that evening when the crocuses were spreading their promise of summer all over the place, this gentleman dropped in for a chat, "Oh—ah, flowers!" he said. "I find they vitiate the air so." He knew the way from the Canal of the Roses to the Grammar-School and round home by his five-o'clock ordinary. He must have been aware that the world was bigger, because he himself had been born on the other side of Amsterdam, and Amsterdam is a large city, but, if he knew, he kept the secret well.

Between the Baron and his fellow-lodger, who, by-the-bye, had mistaken the crocuses for tulips, there was nothing in common but the house they lived in, a strong bond in itself. The two would sit smoking their pipes together, and once the old gentleman treated his guest to a glass of "the King's Wine." There were only half a dozen bottles left, which the Baron had refused to sell.

And they would converse on trifles. The Baron rarely reverted to his brighter past or dwelt upon his

present troubles. If anyone spoke of troubles, it was the old school-master, who had never been able to manage his class—surely no creature on earth is worthier commiseration. “It must be so hard to teach bigger boys,” said the Baron sympathetically. “My little fellows were tiresome at first, till I told them very seriously how sorry I should be if we did not get on well. Big boys, of course, would have paid no attention to that.”

Though the Baron did not speak of his fallen greatness, Gustave proclaimed to all the neighbourhood what a very great man the Baron was. The neighbours would look up, in vague curiosity, for a glimpse of where he sat, behind the small-paned window, scrupulously tidy and venerably white. And some of them would take off their hats. That reminded the Baron of Deynum, and hugely delighted him. “The world is full of good people,” the Baron said.

“Is it true, Mynheer,” asked Dr. Barten, the school-master, one evening, “that ‘Ipsa glorior infamia’ is the motto of your noble house?”

“Yes,” said the Baron curtly, shrinking from the subject.

“Then, it ought to have been ‘ignominia,’ Mynheer.”

The Baron was very much taken aback. “Why?” he asked, and his hand trembled.

“Infamia is used of some inner, moral shame,” expounded the pedagogue with great relish, “Ignominia of an outer perceptible blot. The latter is evidently intended.

“I am very sorry,” said the Baron sadly. “It has always been infamia.”

"Yes, it is a pity; with dead languages we should be particularly careful, for they cannot look after themselves. But, whether in ignominy or infamy, undoubtedly, dear Baron, the right to glory is yours."

"No, no," said the Baron disconsolately, "so even that is wrong."

A couple of days later he came to the Baroness after his morning's lesson. "My dear," he said, "the little boys are not coming back any more. I do not think it is right to take money for teaching them and then not to do it. The last few times I have not been able; my head gets too tired. They are very good and do their best, but this morning I told them they must not come to-morrow. I was sorry, and they cried. But I must write to their parents. And God will take care of us."

The Baroness looked up at him but did not speak.

"And, my dear," he went on quietly, "there is something else I want to tell you; I can choose no better moment. Your own money, dearest, I used it—in speculation—to avert the sale. It was very foolish of me, very wicked. I have seen of late how surely my pride has worked my ruin. Lest disgrace should fall upon my head, I have heaped it on my soul."

He stopped speaking, his voice tremulous, his head bowed. "I knew it," said the Baroness.

The words startled him in their calmness. "Knew it," he stammered.

"I knew," continued the Baroness simply, "that the money had been there and I saw it was gone. Never mind, dear; it was not much."

“Gertrude,” he murmured, “you will love me to the end—will you not?—as you have always done. It is only a little way.”

And then the old lady began to cry. The husband had to find her pocket-handkerchief and wipe the tears from her stiff, pale face. There was rain beating against the windows. The lodging-house room was full of a murky mist.

Next morning the Baron did not get up, and Wendela, in the pauses between her lessons, had two of them to nurse.

CHAPTER XXIX.

REKSELAAR.

"I FEAR the contents of this letter will surprise and vex you. I entreat you to believe that not for one moment did I foresee the possibility of asking you a favour when I began our correspondence, if correspondence it can be called.

"Yes, I am asking you a favour. You are a literary man, an associate of literary men. Could you procure me copying or translation or some such work? You can judge of my hand-writing. It is true, as I told you, that I am a woman of high rank—doubtless, you dislike me on that account—but I am also a woman in great poverty, struggling to earn a livelihood; and for that you will think none the worse of me. I am not ashamed to claim your help; if you can assist me, appoint some place of meeting, but promise on your word of honour never to find out my name or address."

Volkert placed an advertisement in the following number of "The Cry." "Come to Mevrouw Morèl's, 5 Little Paradise, to-morrow at noon." "She will be surprised," he thought to himself with a smile, "to see her kind old man." His interest in his unknown admirer definitely sank under her request for "literary

work." He could easily picture the kind of creature, ringletted, mittened, melancholy, old maidish.

At the appointed time he went to Mevrouw Morèl's. "I am so thankful you are willing to protect me," he said, "I feel horribly nervous." "And to protect the lady, eh?" retorted Mevrouw. "Quite so," said Volkert gravely.

Punctually at noon a ring at the street-bell announced the aspirant for hard labour on bread and water. "I like that," said Mevrouw Morèl, "you can do twice as much, if only you are precise." A quick foot-step was heard ascending the stairs; the room-door was thrown open, a tall, striking-looking girl appeared on the threshold, stopped, gave a sharp glance at the couple who rose to receive her, turned and fled downstairs again, flinging to the door.

Mevrouw Morèl remained staring at her companion, with round eyes of amazement.

"Wendela!" said the young man aloud, to himself, in utter discomfiture.

"What is it? I don't understand. How absurd! Tell me quick," cried little Mevrouw Morèl, her comely face alive with curiosity.

"I have met that young lady before," answered the poet. "More, dear Mevrouw, I myself do not understand."

Piet Poster, standing expectant outside, every nerve on the "qui-vive," was terrified to see the Freule van Rexelaer come rushing down, her face aflame.

"But, Freule," he burst out, "what has happened?"

You promised to warn me immediately. You haven't been gone ten seconds. Let me run up and punch——"

"No, no, Piet," cried Wendela, "nothing is wrong. Only come away quick, I beg of you. I don't want to remain in this place one moment longer!"

So this time Piet Poster did not demolish the enemy. In the silence of their rapid homeward walk the Freule once only interrogatively ejaculated: "Pilgrim!" and Poster, shyly glancing sideways, saw fresh blushes mantle her crimson cheek.

The young poet walked across to the office, altogether bewildered, and sat down in Spangenberg's room. Vainly he knit his eyebrows over this new experience; he could understand nothing of the Freule van Rexelaer's need. But an immense pity and kindness filled his impulsive heart.

Presently Spangenberg arrived in a state of supreme elation. "Hurrah!" he cried, as soon as he saw his friend. "Can you keep a secret, a secret which all the town will know in a day or two?"

"Of course I can keep a secret," replied the other testily, thinking he knew too many already.

"No, but mine is one worth knowing, one I enjoy so much I want you to enjoy it too. We have heard—too much of late, and little thanks to Wonnema!—of the Mandarin Ri-Ksi-La, His Excellency the Count of Deynum, Lord of the August Household of our sovereign Liege, the King."

"We have," said the other. "Too much. Let us talk of something else."

"Stupid fellow, luckily for you I know and forgive

your surly humours. You deserve to miss the story. Well, this chief of one of the oldest, noblest families of Europe—the van Rexelaers are that,—are they not?”

“Of course,” acquiesced the other wearily.

“Quite so—is the grandson of an innkeeper in a hamlet near the frontier, a gin-shop-man called Rekselaar”—he spelt the word—“just simple Mathew Rekselaar, not even connected, as you see, by name with the great historic race.”

“Another lie of Wonnema’s,” said Christian’s companion calmly. “One would feel for Count van Rexelaer, if only on account of this vulgar persecution. For shame, Spangenberg, you are as bad as your clerk!”

“His Excellency is a worthy object of your sympathy,” began Christian in a scornful tone.

“He is,” burst in the other with unexpected violence.

“Do I not say so? But, Pelgrim, you should not presume that I find such delight in slander. I had excellent reason to sift this matter, and thereby do yeoman service to a worthy man, a real noble, as it happens—I, Christian Spangenberg, is that not a freak of fate? It appears there was an error in the register at first, the fault of some rustic clerk, and his present Lordship’s father quietly added the ‘van.’ Nothing easier, as everyone knows, than to effect an erroneous entry in the registers, nothing harder than to get it remedied later on. This family, you may be sure, has never filed an application. It was the gin-seller’s son who worked himself up the backstairs into the palace; he

had an exceedingly handsome wife, a haberdasher's daughter—there are nasty stories why he got his Countship, but that's slander; I stick to business."

"Well, the title is genuine then, at any rate," cried the Count Rexelaer's champion, turning a hot face, for one moment, towards the lawyer.

"The new title is genuine, of course. Nothing surprises one more than the ease with which upstarts start up. Besides half a dozen genealogists, whose hobby is quite out of fashion, who knows that this Holy Roman Count is the coarsest of shams? What, then, will his Lordship say to see his gin-selling, tape-selling grandsires uncoffined and his own name published in print, corrected and revised up to date?"

"I said too little," declared the other bitterly. "You are worse than Wonnema."

"And why have I ferreted out all this? The great lord who arouses your pity, not content with stealing the real Rexelaer's name and acquiring his property you know how, has used the confusion obtained by fraud to seize on a revenue due to the head of the house, for he poses as such. He has brought down his innocent rivals from honourable poverty to honourable privation. Whilst rolling in his filthy prosperity, second only to the Sovereign, honoured, flattered and envied, he is stealing their last crust from these people who have never even risen against the lie of his life. Evidently he hates them; perhaps for that reason. It is said that his wife is no better than he. It is said there is a son. Poor fellow, I pity him. Perhaps he will never find out the truth; let us hope, if he does, he will take after his father sufficiently not to care.

God help him else"—the young editor was violently excited—"I would rather be one of my match-boys in the streets of Amsterdam than that man's pampered, envied, blood-and-dirt-nurtured heir!"

"For God's sake, stop!" cried the other, facing round. "I am he."

CHAPTER XXX.

"HE LEADETH ME IN GREEN PASTURES."

"LET us go at once and tell him," said "Volkert" ten minutes later. "Let *me* tell him; it is my right. I am sure my father will refund the money, as soon as he understands." Spangenberg let this view pass; he had never pitied Pelgrim Volkert half as much as he pitied the Jonker Reinout Rexelaer.

"Yes," he answered, "the fact that the different spelling can be proved nullifies any claim to 'the Lady's Dole.' It was not so easy to unearth the evidence. Piet Poster has done the greater part, travelling round from village to village, till he found the right place and right entry at last. He could not have worked with greater energy, had he been working for himself."

"But if these things were so," protested Reinout, "I cannot understand the Baron's not showing us up before."

"You would, if you knew him. He would never have stirred even now, had you left him bread to eat. He told me himself: 'Count Rexelaer's family history is his business not mine. I need not expose its seamy side because his wife was her uncle's heiress.' That's the kind of man the Baron is."

"But the pedigree in the hall at home," groaned

Reinout. "I have known it since my birth. All our ancestors up to Rovers, the Protestant, who joins on to the main line with Ruwert, his Catholic brother? I cannot believe you. It is all worked out and printed in the Archives of the Nobles of Holland. It is matter of history."

"History will be none the worse for a few lies more or less," said Spangenberg, smiling sadly. "As for you, you will be a Count when your father dies. You must be content with that."

Reinout lifted his eyes and slowly fixed them upon his friend. Their depths were swelling with mute despair.

Christian rose hurriedly, unable to endure more. "Dear old fellow," he said, unsteadily, "no one can help you but yourself," and then he hurried away, lest the other should see him break down.

When he came back several hours later, in the evening, he found Reinout sitting just as he had left him, moodily pensive, with folded arms. At the noise of the opening door the Jonker roused himself. "I want to go—at once—" he said, "to Baron Rexelaer. Christian, you must take me there."

"Very well," acquiesced Spangenberg, secretly delighted. "I was going to-night, in any case, to tell of my success." So, presently, they started together.

"There's a little waiting-room," said Christian, as they neared the house, "where you'd better wait a minute while I ask permission to bring you in. But first I must tell him about the 'Dole.'"

The pair passed down the long, ill-lighted corridor.

"That's the door," nodded Christian. "There's never anybody there. I'll be back in a minute."

Reinout turned the handle and found himself once more—in a little box of a room—face to face with the Freule Wendela. The girl was concocting some mess or medicine she needed for her invalids. She put down the cup on the table. "And so this is the way," she said, trembling, "in which you keep your word, Mynheer?" He paused on the threshold, secure in the thought that she could not pass him. "I had no idea," he stammered hurriedly. "I beg of you to believe me. I came to see your father. You misjudge me; it is only natural, but I swear that you misjudge me!" The spirit lamp boiled over in a spreading splutter. He bent to extinguish the flame, and she caught up her cup and left him without another word.

He heard her speaking to Spangenberg outside. "I thought you were the doctor," she was saying. "You will find him very ill."

Reinout waited for several minutes in the bare little room, which was not much more than a cupboard for hats and cloaks. The pale wall-paper had lost its pattern; the blind hung torn and crooked, there was a hole in the shabby oil-cloth where the boards came staring through. He stood beside a bright-green, varnished table, full of stains, a very epitome, it seemed to him, of vulgarly pretentious poverty. That dirty, gaudy table brought home to him his father's guilt as nothing else had done. He turned away from it to the open window. A mean little back-yard with tall houses close

behind it, a couple of brilliant flower-pots on lofty window-sills, enhancing, not amending, the misery around, here and there an overhanging towel or a bare-faced sponge, the whole of it gaunt and squalid under the early-fading light.

The weather was soft and warm; after a mild May-day of fruitful rain the clouds were lifting, and under slowly gathering shadows the slumbrous earth lay hushed, heavy with the travail of nascent life through every fibre of her being.

Christian opened the door and looked in. His energetic countenance was solemnized into repose. "Come," he said, "I have told him about you. He is willing to see you." Reinout followed into an adjoining chamber, and there, propped up on the pillows of a green-curtained lodging-house bed, he saw lying the gentle yet haughty face he had so often admired in silence at Deynum. Seated at the head of the bed was the Baroness, straight and still; behind her stood Wendela; the Freule had been weeping. And at the other end of the small room, in the background, Reinout noticed, with a touch of surprise, Father Bulbius, the parish-priest from "home."

That morning the Baron had asked them to send for Father Bulbius. "I did not want to ask too soon," he had said, "but I want to ask to-day." When the telegram came, Veronica had of course said: "No." Her rule seemed absolute now-a-days, and she at once explained to the Father that he was hardly feeling well. "I should go if I were dead," Father Bulbius had answered fiercely, and the pimple on his face had openly scowled at Veronica.

All through the day the Baron had lain quiet, waiting for his old friend. His wife thought he was dozing. Towards evening he roused himself and called to Wendela. "There is a paper in my desk I should like to have," he said, "under several others, in the left-hand corner. Yes, thank you. That is it." He waited until once more alone with the Baroness, who sat immovable by his side. "Gertrude," he then began, "you know this parcel. The statement it contains of Count Rexelaer's conduct towards us is accurate, and, I honestly believe, impartial. I have resisted your suggestion to send it to the King and now I can tell you why. I had always intended to do so at my death, hoping that from it some provision might result for you. That is my one great sorrow that I must leave you like this. But now the moment has come, I don't want to seek help for you and Wendela by what, if not exactly an evil action, is at least an ungenerous one. Gertrude, I want your permission to tear up this document. God will provide."

The Baroness could not answer him. "May I?" he asked, holding up the papers. She bent her head. An expression of great relief came over the sick man's features as he sank back in his pillows and lay slowly destroying the memorial on which he had spent many laborious hours. He had always been sluggish with his pen.

He was able to speak quite calmly with Father Bulbius, when that gentleman arrived, towards evening, hot with travelling and anxiety. "It was like you to come at once," he said. "I believe, dear Father, that I have not long to live. Since my last stroke, three

weeks ago, I have been very tired. Yes, I had another stroke, or fit, or whatever the doctors call it; fortunately Gustave alone was with me and I warned him not to tell. I am ashamed to remember how tired I was, but to-day I am not tired, and so glad to rest. And I am quite willing, Father, to do all that the church requires of me. I myself cannot think that God expects much more from us than humbly to cast ourselves upon His mercy. And I should not care for masses to be said on my behalf. But I do not wish to be wiser than others, so tell me what you would have me do?"

"It is not the last sacrament you are asking for?" said the priest, forcing back his emotion.

"When the end is come," replied the Baron quickly, "we must not shrink from the end."

Later on he did not talk much with anyone, but he suddenly beckoned to Bulbius. "You are a cleric," he said. "You must be a scholar. Tell me, is it 'ignominia'?"

"What do you mean, dear Baron?" asked the priest with troubled brow.

"Infamia, you know, glorior infamia? They have been telling me that it was ignominia. The—the outer blot, I think. I do not quite understand. Is it that?"

"No, indeed," replied the priest, with warmth. "They who speak like that know little of us. Obloquy and outer degradation, smears that shift with every phase of thinking, what are these to stir a Christian's pulse? With your ancestor it was indeed the inner humiliation, as the children of this world must ever

deem it, that revealed itself to him as the hidden glory of God."

"I am glad of that," said the Baron wearily. "It has been my comfort all through life; I did not like to think it wrong. But the things that I have gloried in are after all but follies. I have been a poor, erring creature. God forgive me. It is better like that."

And then Spangenberg brought the news that Piet's quest had at last been successful and that, in the face of accumulated evidence, the money would be restored. The Baron said little, but his eyes wandered vaguely towards a side-table on which the torn fragments of paper yet lay. "I am glad the news has come to-day," he said. "Mynheer the advocate, I am deeply grateful for your aid." He was quite willing to see the son of his rival; they brought Reinout to his bedside.

The poor fellow threw himself down on his knees, not knowing what he did, in a passion of useless contrition. All the blame of his father's actions seemed to weigh upon him, the heir, and to crush him. On all sides, wherever he turned his gaze, nothing but infamy!

"Forgive me," he murmured, "say you forgive me. I ask your forgiveness for us all."

"My poor boy, you have done me no hurt," said the Baron gently.

"We have, we have; I cannot separate myself from —them. The shame is ours; the curse is ours. Say you forgive us. I have no right to ask, no right but my exceeding need. I just want your forgiveness, and then I will leave you in peace."

"Surely, if there be anything to forgive, I gladly

forgive," said the Baron in trembling accents, Spangenberg drew Reinout away; he was exciting the feeble old man too much by the violence of his regret. "I should like them to give me a little wine," said the Baron, "I should like Gustave to give it me." The old servant brought, with bent head and unsteady hand, a glass of the King's Wine. His master drank half of it. "Take the rest," said the Baron. "You remember, Gustave? In '30, eh? God save the King!" Gustave saluted silently, unconsciously, as he lifted the wine-glass to his trembling lips.

Outside, the shadows were beginning to deepen. A confused murmur of traffic came up vaguely from the Canal. Someone had opened the window a little, for the room was close with the hot May air. The stifling Canal smell, rendered all the heavier by the day's moisture, came spreading over them all. Even the dying man seemed to perceive it. He moved restlessly once or twice.

Presently he beckoned to Wendela. "I should like," he whispered, "to shake that young man by the hand before he goes. I should like him to make sure—no malice! And there is still one thing I should like to ask."

And so Wendela led Reinout to her father and joined their hands. "With the others?" murmured the old man, eager interrogation in his eyes. "In the Chapel? Both. If ever you have the power." "Yes," said Reinout firmly. "Let us go," whispered Spangenberg in his ear, and the two friends crept out of the room together.

The Baron sank into a long, calm stupor, holding one of his wife's hands all the while.

It grew quite dark in the room, dark and stifling. Toward midnight he opened his eyes and fixed them full on the dear, white face. "In fields," he said, "in fair green fields." And that was the end.

Wendela and her mother remained alone. There were three of them in the room still, and yet there were only two. All the immensity of the change is *there*.

It was long before either moved. At length said the Baroness in a firm voice:

"He was a perfect man. Without reproach."

Even at that moment Wendela lifted a quick look of surprised inquiry to her mother's face. It was only a flash, and immediately she dropped her eyes again. But the Baroness had seen it.

"A perfect man," she repeated steadily. "Sometimes I have asked myself if you fully understood that. All the actions of his life lie patent before me. There is not one of them, even when they caused me the most serious loss, which was not perfectly honourable and upright."

Wendela sank down beside the dead man. Her mother knew, then, knew far more than she did, and approved. "Oh, if I had only understood one day sooner!" she cried in a sudden tempest of tears. "Only a day sooner! Father, father, I shall never be able to tell you now."

And so, at last, Wendela's peace of mind was bought by a lie. For it was a lie, one of those falsehoods by which noble-hearted women shame the truth.

Reinout, on his way home to the little hôtel where he was in the habit of staying under his assumed name of "Volkert," hurried along unheeding, swayed to and fro with the tumult of his thoughts. He did not notice where he was going, as he passed along crowded thoroughfares, noisy with the hundred vulgarities of every-night sale and barter, or turned into little narrow by-streets, desolate beneath their solitary lamp. Presently he emerged upon a quiet square, on one side of which a little crowd was collected. Under a gaslight a man stood preaching; Reinout, looking aside carelessly in passing, recognised the evangelistic tailor, Tipper. He slackened his pace for a moment to listen, and, as he did so, the words fell clearly on his ears: "It's no use. You can't escape from yourself. No man can. You *must* have peace with yourself. And you can't make peace with yourself till you make it *in* God."

"Three for a penny," said a Jew hawker close in front of him, "and warranted to wear."

CHAPTER XXXI.

NO THOROUGHFARE.

"COME back immediately, Reinout. What does this masquerading mean? I have just got you nominated to Vienna, but the Minister wants to see you first. Not knowing where to find you, I was obliged to open your bureau. I am disgusted to discover that you are doing things which require an alias. I command you to return at once.

"VAN REXELAER."

"DEAR FATHER,—I am not coming back. I am never coming back. Do not be angry with me, I entreat of you. I cannot act otherwise. Your life and mine lie so wide apart it is no use trying any longer to link them together.

"RENÉ."

The two papers lay spread out before him on the lodging-house table, his father's summons received that morning, and his own reply, ready, with the ink still wet.

As soon as he had recognised the handwriting of that "Den Heer Volkert, Café Monopole, Amsterdam," he had understood that the decisive moment, too long

kept at bay, was upon him and held him by the throat. The idea, even as he gasped beneath it, brought him relief; he was glad. There are those of us who decide quickly, mostly wrong. There are those who decide slowly, mostly wrong also. He was one of the few who decide slowly and right.

Since the horrible discovery—two days ago—of his father's conduct in connection with "the Lady's Dole," he had lived in the consciousness that he had reached the parting of the ways. He had seen it growing plainer as he journeyed on, but now he had climbed up to it, and was standing still. You cannot stand still long. Happy are you if you can go on straight. Reinout could not. He hesitated, yet from the first he felt—thank God!—that he would turn to the right.

But it is an awful thing for any human heart to cast off all its outer clothing, be that clothing soft or cumbrous, and to stand out naked in the light of a laughing day. Reinout looked back down the past. He recalled how the first flash of light had struck across his velvet-curtained soul when, mazed with the beauty and sick with the sorrow of the wondrous world they were hiding from him, he had first learned, through a girlish gift, in a poet's prophetic promise, that mystery which unlocks all mortal mysteries, the Law of fraternal Love. To love his neighbour as himself—to do good. After all, that is not so very hard! but immortal mysteries rise beyond. To some little vision of these also he had struggled through the thickness of the easy years. To love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul—to do right.

And, long ago, the prisoned song within his breast

had awakened, at the sound of other singing, and fluttered its wings on high. He *could* not have sung in his cage.

He recalled his first meeting with Spangenberg. After the acceptance of several of his enthusiastic poems by "The Cry of the People," its editor had printed a request to their author to call. He had gone to Amsterdam, retaining the pseudonym under which he had written, and had naturally become known in "Little Paradise" as "Volkert." He had found there a fresh and healthful and honestly-aspiring life; but his course lay elsewhere. A gentilhomme devoir fait loi.

And he loved his shallow, friendly father, all whose yet unfulfilled ambition was centred on the son and heir. His mother—hush, he paused before that sepulchre and flung away the key.

Of the story of Dora Droste he could think more calmly. He saw that Wonnema's account of it was coloured by personal spite, and he therefore refused to accept the discharged servant's conclusions. The Count treated such matters as all his acquaintances treated them. With a bleeding heart, Reinout could excuse him.

Against Loripont's accusations, also, he felt that he could at least partially defend his father—in the heat of his yearning to justify him altogether. After all, the hurried scrawl of a man pain-maddened to suicide was not a reasonable will; after all, it might be presumed, might be hoped, that the Count had been ignorant of the source of Margherita's fortune; after all——

But no: "I cannot live any longer on that money," he said. "It is no use reasoning about it." Nor was

it possible to smudge away the clear-cut truth of Spangenberg's revelations. For the first time he beheld his father's unvarnished nature. And at the same time his own nobility fell from him. All the chivalry of his youth in a clatter of tin.

From the life, then, to which he had dutifully clung, while it only seemed distasteful, he now must break away, because God had proved it evil. A gentilhomme devoir fait loi.

He sat down and began a letter to his father; he began several times, with new confidence, after every false start. At last it was finished, a lengthy document, summing up all his difficulties, his doubts, his grievances, tacitly exonerating his parents from any share in causing them. The writing it all down in orderly sequence, the thinking out the tumult of his thoughts, did him good. "It is no use reasoning about it," he repeated when all was over. "I cannot live on *that* money, and that settles the matter."

He carefully read the letter over again. Then he drew from his breast-pocket a small morocco case and sat looking at the two portraits it contained. His father, with the nervous, shifty features and silken whiskers, all the well-known illustrious orders scattered over neck and chest; his mother, handsome still with a certain conscious comeliness, stout and décolletée—too stout and far too décolletée—in her laces, diamonds and flowers. Slowly he closed the case and hid it away again. Then, with weary hand, he took up the letter and tore it across.

Ten minutes later he had written the few lines of answer recorded above and posted them in the letter-

box at the corner of the street. It was done, then. You let go the last tip of the envelope and "it" is irretrievably done. He walked briskly away in the direction of "Little Paradise." His thoughts were of Vienna, at first, and the ultra-covetable small balls at the Hofburg: "I hope you like our society, Monsieur de Rexelaer?" "Your Majesty is too gracious; who would not be charmed?" And then he drifted away to Deynum Castle, and the Chevalier—how sorry that good old man would be!—and the Countess, his mother, among her birds and flowers. Amarinda was dead; Florizel still tottered on three rheumatic legs. After all, the starry career was his; he had been born to it, educated for it: his whole life had been lapped in its supercilious luxury. The home was his, the beautiful resting-place of that illustrious race which had been his from the cradle. The great lady, the Countess, was his mother. In all separation we cry out, there. It is no use casting away keys, when lock and chain hold firm.

He turned into "Little Paradise" and nodded up at Mynheer Morèl. "Will you come and take a walk with me round the square?" the old man called down. "Presently, Mynheer," Reinout answered back. "Please begin without me. I must have a long talk with Spangenberg first." The Master frowned; he was unaccustomed to the most indirect of "no's."

"For the moment, I am going to stop here," Reinout said bravely to Christian. "I am not going back to the Hague. But that means that I must earn my own livelihood. I have been wondering whether, if Poster passes his examination and leaves you, you could

engage me on trial in his place? You know, I have taken my law-degree."

"My dear boy," cried Christian, "you are welcome to whatever help I can give you, but you're too good for my law-work. Why, with your education and your languages—half a dozen at your fingers' ends—you can get a much better post than that! Don't you remember what I said to you when first you came to me? Well, you *can* earn money; be thankful for it."

"I believe that I could perhaps get something better, but, Christian, I want to have just this. I want you to take me for one year only and to let me earn what Poster earns. At the end of that time I shall probably go away. You see I am perfectly frank with you."

"And then?"

"That is my secret. A fresh secret. Not a very important one."

"But why don't you rather try literature?"

Before Reinout could answer, a pebble struck the window; Father Morèl, having twice completed the circuit of the grass-plot and being big with sublimest thoughts, stood making impatient signs.

"Yes, yes; in a minute," nodded Reinout; "Literature!" he repeated, turning again to his friend. "Do you seriously recommend me to earn my bread by that? Look here, I will tell you a little story. Three or four years ago, while I was a student at Leyden, a thin volume of poetry appeared, entitled "The Morning of a Life." The name was not very original; the book was a modest one. Have you ever heard of it?"

"No," said Christian.

"Nor has anyone else, except the man who paid the bill. His name was 'Pelgrim Volkert.' When the little book first came out, he watched anxiously—oh so anxiously!—for the opinion of 'the literary world.' Sometimes he thought that little book contained the baldest rubbish ever penned; sometimes he fancied it so full of heartfelt beauty that none could read it without tears. In his inmost confidence he believed it would create a stir. Had it done so, I am not sure whether there would not have been a student less at Leyden, next term. Well, several weeks passed; then there appeared a long review in a provincial paper, saying—I don't mind telling now—that the book contained some of the most exquisite poetry in the language, and repeatedly asserting that here was a new light at last in the waste of Dutch literature. I suppose that the light was a Will-o'-the-Wisp. The rest is silence. Three copies were sold, and six months later the author paid the bill. I remember that, on the evening of that most eventful day, he told his father: 'Yes, he should like the Diplomatic Service very much indeed.'"

"Quite so," said Christian.

"And you propose to me to live by literature?"

"I was thinking of the by-ways, not the high-ways," replied the editor, "reviews, articles, studies—journalistic, compilatory, biographical work. But you are right. I don't think you could make a living out of literature. At least, not in this small country. And do you know why?"

"Why? I should think I did."

"No, but let me tell you what I mean. I think you

can stand it to-day and, moreover, you deserve it, after what you have gone through this morning. Don't laugh. You are a genius. That is all."

Reinout staggered, almost as if he had received a blow.

"I—I don't think so," he stammered, stupidly.

"But I do. And I have seen a good deal of your work in the 'Cry,' and I am a better judge than yourself. There, that is enough for to-day. Now go and walk with Father Morèl. He's another. But, then, fortunately, he has Mevrouw to take care of him."

Reinout found the poet vexed by having been kept waiting; he was not good company. Said his fond wife to herself as she laid down her endless darning to watch them turn in the little square: "There the good man goes, scattering all his diamonds, as usual, for another to pick up and set in his crown. Well, I'm glad the other's Pelgrim Volkert. He's a genius. Like all geniuses, he will live alone, and be buried by a crowd."

CHAPTER XXXII.

ALONE.

A FEW days later Piet Poster successfully passed his third and final examination. Immediately afterwards he sought a situation as assistant-Notary in the Southern Provinces and, being a zealous Catholic, easily obtained one. He wanted to leave Amsterdam, he said.

He wanted to leave Amsterdam, although his Pa-

troness, as he persisted in calling the Baroness, still remained there. The widowed lady had declined Father Bulbius's renewed offer of the Parsonage. "No indeed," said Wendela, "we must never go back."

Besides, the Baron lay buried,—temporarily?—in the public cemetery at Amsterdam. In spite of its modest adjuncts, his funeral had been a quietly imposing one, for a large number of his old colleagues of the States Provincial had come up to attend it, as well as many members of the Order of Nobles of the Province, headed by Baron Borck. Not one of them but had remarked with astonishment among the mourners the young heir of the new lord of Deynum.

A white cross was to be erected on the grave. The Baroness could afford it; what a vulgar, all-important little point! But even the ditch into which sorrow sinks has to be duly paid for, as also the stone which affection puts up to remember the spot by. "I should like to stipulate," Count Rexelaer had said to Spangenberg, "that the family do not return to Deynum." "If the money is refunded immediately," Christian had replied, "there will be no prosecution." Shortly afterwards capital and interest were paid over to her who was now become, indisputably, the last of the Ladies Rexelaer. Count Hilarius said that he hated the appearance of injustice and would rather err on the side of too great generosity. He retained his opinion that the testator had intended the money to go with the Castle, but he rejoiced that the benefit of the doubt enabled him thus delicately to succour the aged Baroness, of whose destitute condition he had not been aware. Spangenberg was a bright young fellow, as we

have seen, but when he left the presence of the Lord of the Household, he could not have told you whether his Excellency, prior to this visit, had been aware of that little inaccuracy in the spelling of his noble name. "My father was very exact," said Count Rexelaer blandly. "I cannot understand a slip on his part in so weighty a matter."

"Yes, Freule, I'm going to-morrow," said Piet. "And you know who's to have my old room, don't you?"

"No," replied Wendela indifferently. "Who?"

"Don't you really? The Jonker Rexelaer."

"Indeed!" said Wendela in the same tone. But the news was distasteful to her. She had not seen Reinout again since the day of the funeral, nor did she wish to see him.

"Before I go, Freule," said Piet Poster, awkwardly standing by the open door, "I wanted to thank you for all you have done for me."

Frank Wendela cried out. "It's the other way," she said.

"Please don't say that," replied the young man hurriedly. "I haven't been able to do anything, really. But one thing I shall always be glad and proud of, that it was I who was, indirectly, the cause of Mynheer the Baron's employing Mynheer Spangenberg. Do you know, Freule, when I ran away from Deynum, I had made up my mind to sail to foreign countries and come back in a year or two with barges full of gold-dust to repurchase the Castle, as people do in story-books. I found out soon enough what a fool I was; I

haven't been able to repurchase the Castle, but—but——" he hesitated. "The Jonker van Rexelaer is a good man," he said.

"He told me," said Wendela, "about the beating you gave him, when a boy."

"Did he, Freule? Those are not the kind of beatings that hurt. I hope he will be happy some day, and I hope you will be happy, Freule, very happy, and sometimes remember how we used to play together. how you used to play with me, I mean, when we were children at Deynum."

"Goodbye, Piet," she said, holding out her hand. "I shall not forget. I hope that you, too, will be very happy."

He gently took the extended hand and bent over it. He would have liked to lift it to his lips, but he was a Dutchman and, above all things, dreaded making himself ridiculous; he checked the impulse and drew back. "Goodbye, Freule," he whispered, and went away.

After his departure complete monotony settled down over the house on the Canal of the Roses; there was monotony in everything, even in the landlady's voice as she harassed the slavey. "Your father was perfect," the Baroness had said, yet there was an endless monotony in her prayers for the dead man, and her sorrows for his sufferings in purgatory. And for this worry of her mother's Wendela could feel nothing but half-repressed disgust; she rejoiced in her newfound relief from the load of her father's guilt.

She tended the invalid as one nurses a little child,

and bore, without complaint, the placidity of her pleasureless, painless existence. Surreptitiously she continued to buy the "Cry of the People," which she had first seen, by the by, through Piet Poster. She would meet Reinout on the stairs, and from time to time he paid a formal evening-call. He was very quiet, and apparently very busy. Juffrouw Donders informed the Freule that he used to sit up quite late into the night. And the landlady's opinion carried weight, not only because she controlled the consumption of paraffin, but also because of her habit of walking the house at all hours, to superintend her lodgers, if possible, through the key-hole.

After the first tornado of protest, things also settled down into comparative calm at the Hague. In answer to discreet inquiries the police had informed His Excellency the Lord High Senechal that a person called Pelgrim Volkert was well known to them as a writer of seditious verses in that obscure newspaper, the "Cry of the People." The police always know so much, they seldom care to know all.

Count Rexelaer's supreme dread now was lest they should find out who Pelgrim Volkert was. What would become of a Court Official whose son was proven a socialist? Yet he felt that such degradation was fast clouding over his coroneted head.

With this horror upon him he hazarded a wild effort to get Reinout declared insane. It failed; even the closest of nets must have meshes. Whereupon he wrote him a letter damp with tears, a father's heart-broken appeal, the prayer of a man who was losing what

he best loved on earth. "Dearest, dearest father," the son wrote back, "let us give up this infamous fortune, and the Castle, which is not even ours!" Everyone noticed how gray and worn Count Rexelaer was looking. He spoke angrily to Margherita: "The boy has covered with infamy the noble name which he bears," he said. "It is your fault with your poetry and nonsense. It is your roturier-blood. A hundred times rather I had wished he was dead." "My poetry was always sensible," retorted Margherita. "It is your ridiculous education that has ended like this. And as for my blood, what is yours, Monsieur le Cabaretier? Do you not think I know *now*—from your dear sister Elizabeth? Leave me in peace with my terrible sorrow. You are insufferable; only yesterday Monsieur de Bonnaventure was remarking how irritable you have grown."

The Chevalier wiped a tear out of his bleared old eye with a silk handkerchief. It was given out that the only son of the Rexelaers had gone abroad for his health; Mevrouw Elizabeth, who was exceedingly put out by Antoinette's disappointment, added that the poor young fellow had always been a little wild. People touched their foreheads significantly. Oh the instability of human greatness! Everything, yes *everything* that Fortune could bestow. And now *this*!

During all these months Reinout kept on very quietly. He did his daily task for Spangenberg, and occasionally, though more rarely, contributed a few verses to the "Cry."

"You never send me a letter now about my poems," he once ventured to remark to the Freule van Rexelaer.

"No," replied that young lady shortly.

"Perhaps you have given up reading them?"

"No."

"Or do you, having glanced at them, pay no further attention to their contents?"

"Oh no." But this last "no" was ambiguous.

Antoinette had faithfully kept her cousin's secret; no one knew of his writings in the French magazines. The literary circle in "Little Paradise" looked upon him as a Dutch writer of genuine genius, doomed to hopeless obscurity by the very language he wrote in. But even such recognition as Holland can bestow they never expected to be his. He was not a "popular" poet; the artisans who read the "Cry" skipped his poetry, which had not even a chorus. Besides the Dutch, great in painting, are dead to poetry. Even in painting imagination is a sin. It was by imagination that our common mother fell. Had she been content to perceive that an apple is an apple she might have been in Paradise at this hour, as many a substantial Dutch burgher-mother is. Woe to him that distinguishes apples of discord and apples of Sodom and golden apples of the Hesperides, in quest of which latter, perhaps, he sails away into the Unknown. We live both comfortably and righteously in Holland—nowhere more so—but we do not live by admiration, hope and love. We live by the fear of God and the care of our purses. And we all of us, except the poets, despise a poet just a little for not being something else. Reinout, therefore, was singularly fortunate in having happened on the Morèls.

He knew it, and thoroughly enjoyed those Sunday evenings—much Poetry and a little punch—which now formed his sole recreation. Of the company which

gathered about Homérus none but Spangenberg was acquainted with the details of the new-comer's story. They had heard that he had broken loose from old moorings in a comfortable haven to row with his brothers against the stream. They also knew that "Pelgrim Volkert" had been a literary pseudonym, but they never connected its bearer in their thoughts with that great historic house of which the Mandarin Ri-Ksi-La was the acknowledged head.

Sometimes an allusion would cause the young fellow to wince, as when Homérus, having discoursed on the limits to man's self-sufficiency, wound up with the words: "No human plant ever fully recovers from transplanting. No organism has more than one "home." The uprooted heart, whatever may become its future surroundings, goes through life alone."

Reinout pushed back his chair into the shade.

"When my father and my mother forsake me," began the tailor.

"Then shall I be forsaken indeed," concluded Spangenberg.

"Then the Lord shall take me up," said the tailor.

"That is finely put," remarked Reinout's voice.

"It is from the Bible," replied the tailor. "Have you who are, I believe, an orphan never found it there?"

"No," said Reinout awkwardly.

"Perhaps you have never looked for it, or for anything else. If you have not got a Bible, I should be very glad to send you one."

"I will get one," said haughty Reinout, and then instantly repented: "I mean," he added, "that I should not wish to trouble you."

"It will be a very simple one, mind you—outside. The jewel's the same, whatever the casket."

"Thank you very much indeed," said Reinout.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SUCCESS.

WHEN Reinout abruptly brought his clerkship to an end, his year of probation was only ten months old. April had come round again with premature joys and uncertain promises, foreshadowing a fairer, though not a fresher, sunshine in broad cloudsweeps of wind and rain. It had been a bright, breezy day, full of the turmoil of Nature's restless awakening, with sudden gusts of movement and floods of warmth, one of those days on which all the young world seems dancing merrily, from the bare trees and bold clouds up in heaven to the dead leaves and swift brooks down on earth. A great ripple of jollity spread over creation, the clear wind played up to the dancers and the sly sun laughed down on the dance.

Reinout had spent his day as usual at the office, doubled up over the endlessly useless entanglements of the law. Spangenberg, who hated the systematized robbery of his profession with a constantly increasing contempt, had gone off early to his editorial business, and his clerk was glad enough, at four o'clock, to shut up shop and betake himself to the Canal of the Roses. They were a queer pair of lawyers, and the greater part of the business of the office consisted in unavailing attempts to protect the defenceless.

At his lodgings Reinout found a foreign letter awaiting him. This letter, which he had been daily expecting for weeks, he now tore open as if his life depended on a hundredth of a second of time. His eyes flashed through the contents, and he was out of the door again and off to "Little Paradise." "Good gracious!" cried Christian, looking up from his desk. "Is the Prinsengracht in flames?"

"No," gasped Reinout in joyous breathlessness, "but it will be, Christian, when I have set the world on fire!" And he spread out his open letter in front of his friend.

Spangenberg read it and looked up with his brightest smile.

"You only lose a bad clerk," said Reinout.

"Exactly," replied Spangenberg.

After a moment he added: "So this was your secret. What a linguist you must be!"

"Oh no; I have always spoken more French than Dutch at—home. But don't think that this bird has come falling into my mouth ready-roasted. It has taken a lot of labour and patience to catch and to kill. I've been hard at work for years, trying to get things inserted in the Parisian reviews. Nobody ever knew anything about it, except, quite towards the end, a dear little cousin, who hid away my secret as soon as she had discovered it. It used to be so funny, sometimes, people asking me, for instance, whether I ever read the French reviews?"

"How can people find out if you don't tell them?"

"True, but I couldn't. Nor would you have turned the love of your bosom naked into a dancing-room.

There, I'm growing coarse and accurate. Do you think it wrong of me to write in French?"

"No more wrong than for the pastor of a small country-parish to accept a call to a great city-church. Dutch is at the best but the language of one family, with a large proportion of deaf-mutes among its children. French is the language of the civilized world."

"That's what I have always thought, and I considered my efforts in Dutch altogether secondary, but of course others may judge differently; I can't help that. Well, it has been a hard struggle, but success, or something very like the beginning of success, has come at last."

He took up his letter and read it over again. It was a communication from a well-known Parisian publisher to whose review he had already frequently contributed some trifle. The publisher wrote that he accepted the manuscript novel which had been sent him, though suggesting a change towards the close, and that he offered, for the copyright, not the enormous sums we so often see set down in the story-books, but a bona fide price of nine thousand francs. Out of the pure goodness of his heart he added some sentences of warmest commendation, both of this work and of former contributions to the "Revue."

"Yes, I have come down to prose," said Reinout sorrowfully. "It's no use, nowadays."

"But, dear fellow, do you know what makes me so happy?" cried Spangenberg with beaming eye. "When fame comes to you, as I am sure it will, world-wide fame, they will be proud of you over yonder, in the

Hague! They will be jealous—fiercely appreciative, perhaps, but still appreciative.”

“Do you think so?” asked Reinout, in the same sorrowful tone. “I do not. How little you know, Christian, the classes or the ‘social conditions’ your paper makes war against. With the people from amongst whom I came out the smallest bit of ribbon of Franz Joseph’s giving at Vienna would far have excelled the laurel-wreath of Shakespeare himself. I might have done anything vile, composed in my leisure moments the bawdiest of love-songs, but not preached sedition! My own father will weep to think I have not failed. He will endeavour to forget me. Perhaps he will succeed.”—Reinout’s voice faltered.—“I am told he has sent for my cousin to Deynum. Listen. Only a few months ago I met in society the grand-daughter of an illustrious French poet, a woman who had just bought, with her honour, the title of ‘Princess.’ Unwisely I talked to her about her ‘immortal grandfather’; can you guess what she answered me? ‘Immortal indeed, there is no escaping from my grandfather. “Ce qu’il y avait d’infime dans son origine et d’infâme dans sa vie” is writ down in all the dictionaries of Europe!’ His life had not been disgraceful in any sense, as you and I read the word. But he had been a revolutionary, a passionate lover of freedom, a scorner of kings. And his origin had been of the humblest, that can never be denied. They will hate me all the more when I call evil evil, because I am one of them.”

“I observe,” said Christian, referring to the letter, “that you have called this book of yours ‘Gloire Infâme.’”

"Yes. When I first began it, I still thought I was entitled to the motto which has been the secret strength of my life. Let the title stand. No one, I have taken care of that, will recognise the story. But it is none the less an autobiography."

Reinout returned home earlier than usual that evening, cherishing, all along the brightened streets, his triumph of the moment and the prospects, financial and other, which it opened up before him. Some perhaps might have feasted so auspicious an event, but it is ill feasting alone.

As he was passing the Baroness's parlour door, the sound of Wendela's singing arrested him. He stood spell-bound on the landing, in the half-light; the spacious alto, clear and warm, he knew and loved; it was not that which now enchained him. But never had he heard it singing to that plaintive air those words of his own: air and words such as Christjan had sung them on the first night at the Morèls'.

"The white doves brood low
With innocent flight.
Higher, my soul, higher!
Into the night!
Into black night!

"Beyond where the eagle
Soars strong to the sun.
Nought hast thou, if only
Earth's stars be won.
Earth's stars are won.

"Beyond where God's angels
Stand silent, in might.

Higher, my soul, higher!
Into the light,
Straight to God's light."

Why had she never sung these words to him. Why did she choose for this singing the moment when she believed him to be away? He knocked boldly and entered. "Mamma is not very well to-night," said the young Freule, rising hurriedly from the piano. "I have been rubbing her; she is trying to sleep."

In that sentence the long patience of her life of quiet sacrifice stretched before him. She stood there, under the cold, blue April sunset, in the beautiful perturbation of a pure and haughty woman. No pretty darling this to be won by an embrace. He went straight to the dimly-lighted window and spread out his letter, as he had done for Spangenberg, and asked her to read it.

"This will not mend matters at the Hague," she said.

"No," he replied quietly, "I understand that. And so do you. You and I, Freule, we *know*, at least, what is this 'world' of which men speak so much. We have held it in the hollow of our hand. Earth's stars are won."

They were standing, looking out, beyond the still canal between its smutty trees, beyond the heavy house-tops, up into the pallid heaven, at solitary Hesperus, white and hard.

"And there is one glory terrestrial," she said; her voice had altered. He turned in astonishment and—oh marvellous sight to him!—he saw that there were tears in those strong brown eyes. "And another glory

celestial, and the glory of man is as the flower of the field."

With a sudden impulse he drew forth a shabby little brown volume. "Do you remember this?" he asked eagerly. "Do you remember giving it me, half a dozen years ago? It was a revelation, in my sordid existence, of a love of something else than gold and guilt. You told me, when you gave it, that it was the greatest treasure you possessed."

"I should not say that now," she answered, taking from the top of the piano a smaller, yet more faded book. She held it out to him; it was a Catholic copy of the New Testament. "My father left it me," she said simply, and then, with splendid scorn: "Bulbius told mother I ought not to have it."

Reinout broke the moment's thoughtful silence. "And do you remember," he continued, "the night in the chapel, and your bidding me choose, beyond all earthly splendour, the glory of God-sent disgrace?"

She turned fully upon him, in the gathering darkness. "Yes," she said in a firm voice, "Knight Pilgrim," and then trembled and shrank away.

"I used to think," he went on, "that surely it was my duty to remain where God had placed me, turning my back on the life I really loved, and working for the best. But, perhaps because he saw me sinking, he has called me, by the voice of *shame*, from the Slough of Despond. Not all men are compelled to choose as I was. I trust to God I have chosen well."

"You will be rewarded," she said, still gazing at the star, "by the good you will do in the future."

"Dear Freule," he answered earnestly. "In some other way, in the old way, perhaps, I could have done as much, and more. But this also I believe that God has taught me: He does not ask us to seek to do most good, but only to do right to-day."

"No, no!" she cried vehemently. "You will do more! A great career will be yours; an immeasurable sphere of usefulness. The God who gave you genius has wonderfully prepared you for the use of his gift. Enthusiasts are ignorant of life, and those who know life are no longer enthusiasts. From a child, as you said but a moment ago, you have held in your hand this bauble of Greatness and Glory and been schooled to appraise it. You can tell us what it is worth, as you cast it away."

She had spoken with her old impulsiveness: she stood panting. "The whole world will listen. We all shall be your family!" she said.

He looked up quickly, with a sad smile: "It is very lonely," he answered, "the human race, and nothing nearer. One feels that, perhaps, most in a moment of success. And my work is only just beginning. You see what this man says"—he pointed to his letter—"Your story is not finished; the career of your hero is left incomplete.' He has seen clearly, too clearly. Unwillingly, I fear, you have borne your large part in the chapters already written. Wendela, can you join me willingly, if we try honestly, cleanly, to write the rest?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RESPICE FINEM.

THE carriages came creeping up in an apparently endless succession; cavalry and police were keeping the crowd back, pushing and prancing amid protests and exclamations, occasionally of admiration, more generally of envy or ill-will. One by one, slowly, in a consistent monotony of variety, the landaus and broughams turned cautiously into the square, their horses' heads gradually taking shape under the gas-lights with a glitter of harness and champing of bits, to the soft guiding voice of the coachman; sometimes there would be a pair of horses, sometimes a single one: bays, grays, the President's old white mares—oh what a big black beauty goes there!—then several chestnuts, one after the other, but always the same big frightened eyes, looming in the damp mist, and the tall servants behind, anxious also, under the steady rain, and a blurr of bright opera-cloak or gold lace against the panes, and then fresh champing and fresh glitter—steady! steady!—and another pair of horses, wet and worried, and the lines of smeared lamps down the distance, not a whit shortened or altered, and another carriage—way there, way!—as the wretched spectators splash back into the shining puddles, and the stream comes flowing on to that wide blaze of light under the awning by the Entrance.

There was a great Reception at the Palace to-night, a "raout," as they call it. Nearly a thousand invitations had been sent out, and such members of the "Everybody" as ought to have been invited and were not, were weeping their eyes out in the bitterness of home.

In the great hall and on the staircase there was decorous confusion. For the flutter which is inseparable from Palace receptions caused all these birds of beautiful plumage to ruffle their feathers in the fear of such ruffling, and many a biped, provided with a third leg by way of ornament, went stumbling and grumbling over that glittering appendage on his passage upstairs. It must be a melancholy consideration for Royalty that nobody ever comes to its entertainments for pleasure, but only to avoid the pain of not having been there. It had done everything in its power to welcome its guests, neither overheating its saloons nor overcooling its wines, and yet everyone was anxious to be home again and frankly confessed as much to everyone else. "Delightful, is it not? So well managed," said one old man, miserable in a stiff gold collar, to another rickety creature in perfectly disgraceful calves. "Yes, Rooseveltdt understands his duty; I shall be glad, though, when it's over." "So shall I;" the collar-tortured individual turned to a bright-looking girl by his side. "Ah, Freule van Rexelaer!" he said. "Now you, doubtless, would like such an evening to last for ever? Very natural, my dear. So should I, when I was your age, so should I."

"No indeed," replied Antoinette, laughing. "I detest these crushes. I am here to chaperon Mamma."

"Antoinette, come here at once," commanded Mevrouw Elizabeth in a flustered whisper. "Are my feathers right? Pretend not to be looking. I feel all crooked. I knocked them against an overhanging palm."

"I think your hair's coming down," replied mischievous Topsy. "Hadn't we better go back?"

"Topsy, how can you be so provoking? I am especially anxious for you to create a good impression. I don't want you to remain on my hands for ever, though it's beginning to look as if you would. What you meant by refusing the two eligible *partis* I procured for you, nobody knows but yourself, and since that infamous boy behaved so disgracefully——"

All the naughty merriment died out of Topsy's eyes. "Yes, yes, I know," she said impatiently. Mevrouw Elizabeth cast an aggrieved glance over her ample shoulders, but she let the ebullition pass. "I am anxious to get near Christine," she said. "I told George that his wife was sure to have all the best men about her. She is so uncommonly attractive."

"Which means," cries Antoinette, "that she flirts so shamelessly she amuses them all."

"Well, at any rate she amuses them, which is more, my dear, than some people seem able to do."

Antoinette did not answer. She never crossed the first barrier of her mother's outspokenness, and so managed to live on the outskirts of peace.

The rooms were filling to overflowing, literally, for a crowd was swaying to and fro between the great doors. Gauzes, and diamonds, and animated faces—bored ones also, and vexed and freely perspiring—and

an overwhelming abundance of uniforms under the candles and greenery in a blaze of colour and a cloud of perfumery amid the incessant rustle and buzz. "It is horribly hot," said Rolline, when she happed upon Guy in the press. "Not a bit," replied that gentleman calmly. "You think so because you are anxious about your dress." "Anxious:" that was the prevailing impression; the anxiety which is always attendant upon the Sovereign, the fear of "something going wrong."

The great folding-doors were thrown wide apart, and a crowd of gilded officials came trooping through. Then, in the opening, there appeared, alone, a man clad in a hussar uniform, with a great orange-gold band across his breast, a man of magnificent bearing and commanding mien. He paused suddenly, and turned to the courtier who stood nearest:

"And your son, my dear Count," he said in French. "He is better, I hope? He is here?"

Count Rexelaer bent in reply as only they can bend who have no backbone:

"Sire," he said, "Je n'ai plus de fils."

THE END.

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